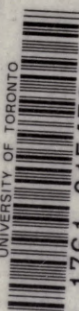


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# *Our Old Actors.*

BY

HENRY BARTON BAKER.

With Portraits.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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Part III.



THE KEMBLE PERIOD.



# OUR OLD ACTORS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE KEMBLE FAMILY.

The Founders of the Kemble Family—Holcroft's Description of a Strolling Company—Strollers Entering a Town—Quitting it—Manager Penchard's Company—Captain Plume with the Gout—A Protean Company—Working a Benefit—Roger Kemble's Children—A Juvenile Prodigy—Sarah Kemble and her Lover—Married.

FROM Ward, who was Roger Kemble's father-in-law, and an actor under Betterton, to Mrs. Scott Siddons, who still graces the stage, we have five successive generations of a family some member of which has been attached to the theatrical profession. This is an astonishing sequence, embracing as it does a period of quite two hundred years, and has probably no parallel.

Ward was a strolling manager when Roger Kemble, who united hair-dressing with acting, eloped with his daughter, a great beauty, who had once been tempted by a coronet. The young couple started in management upon their own account and

strolled from town to town and village to village after the manner, and under the difficulties and disadvantages of the time; at some places received with gracious favour, at others treated like lepers and threatened with the stocks and whipping at the cart's tail, according as the great people were liberal minded or puritanical.

A curious chapter in the history of humanity might be gathered from the annals which the strolling players of the last century, Tate Wilkinson, Charlotte Charke, Ryley, John Bernard, and others have bequeathed us. They are full of humour and full of sorrow, ridiculous, yet tragic; and, however amused we may be by the small vanities, the comical shifts, and laughable stories they abound in, they leave a flavour of sadness behind, and set us thinking upon the truism of how little man's actions are swayed by the substantial interests of life, and how greatly by vanity and self-conceit.

The strolling player has been capitally described by Holcroft in his "Memoirs."

"A company of travelling comedians, then, is a small kingdom of which the manager is the monarch. Their code of laws seems to have existed with few material alterations since the days of Shakespeare, who is, with great reason, the God of their Idolatry. The person who is rich enough to furnish a wardrobe and scenes, commences manager, and has his privileges accordingly; if there are

twenty persons in the company, for instance, the manager included, the receipts of the house, after all incidental expenses are deducted, are divided into four-and-twenty shares, four of which are called *dead* shares, and taken by the manager as payment for the use of his dresses and scenes; to these is added the share to which he is entitled as a performer. Our manager has five sons and daughters all ranked as performers; so that he sweeps eleven shares—that is nearly half the profits of the theatre—into his pocket every night. This is a continual subject of discontent to the rest of the actors, who are all, to a man, disaffected to the higher powers. They are, however, most of them in debt to the manager, and, of course, chained to his galley; a circumstance he does not fail to remind them of whenever they are refractory. They appear to be a set of merry, thoughtless beings, who laugh in the midst of poverty, and who never want a quotation, or a story, to recruit their spirits. When they get any money they seem in haste to spend it, lest some tyrant, in the shape of a dun, should snatch it from them. They have a circuit, or set of towns, to which they resort when the time comes round. I observe that the town's people are continually railing at them; yet are exceedingly unhappy, if they fail to return at the appointed time. It is a saying amongst us that a player's sixpence does not go as far as a townsman's groat; therefore, though

the latter are continually abusing them for running in debt, they take good care to indemnify themselves, and are no great losers, if they get ten shillings in the pound."

Ryley, in his "Itinerant," gives us a picture of a company of strollers entering Worcester, with bag and baggage, scenery and "properties" as good as that of Scarron's in his "Roman Comique." The manager has preceded his troupe and goes out to meet them. "At the entrance of the town I observed a concourse of people collected round a four-wheeled carriage which moved slowly, and on its approach I found to my surprise it was 'the property,' and such an exhibition! Had the carter endeavoured to excite a mob he could not have done it more effectually than by the manner in which he had packed the load. Some scenes and figures belonging to a pantomime lay on the top of the boxes, which were numerous and piled very high. To keep them steady he had placed a door on which was painted in large characters, 'Tom's Punch House,' in front of the waggon; this soon gave a title to the whole. Upon the uppermost box, and right over the door, was a giant's head of huge dimensions, whose lower jaw, being elastic hung, opened with every jolt of the carriage. By the side of this tremendous head rode a large mastiff, who, enraged at the shouts of the mob, barked and belled forth vengeance. The letters on the door

had of course stamped it for a puppet-show, to corroborate which the impudent carter, somewhat in liquor, had placed a paste-board helmet on his head, whilst with awkward gesticulation he thumped an old tambourine, to the no small amusement of the spectators. To finish the farcical physiognomy of this fascinating group, Bonny Long and his wife and nine children, sat in the rear, Bonny in a large cocket hat, his wife with a child at her breast, wrapped in a Scotch plaid, and the other eight in little red jackets."

A companion picture to this is one by Bernard, of a certain Manager Penchard and his company quitting a town. "First came Mr. Singer and Mrs. Penchard, arm-in-arm; then old Joe, the stage keeper, leading a neddy, which supported two panniers containing the scenery and wardrobe, and above them, with a leg resting on each, Mr. Penchard himself, dressed in his Ranger suit of 'brown and gold,' with a wig such as is now worn by a Lord Chief Justice, in which he played Hamlet, Lord Townley, Don Felix, Zanga, &c., and a little three-cornered hat cocked on one side, giving the septuagenarian an air of gaiety that well accorded with his known attachment for the rakes and lovers of the drama; one hand was knuckled in his side (his favourite position) and the other raised a pinch of snuff to his nose; and as he passed along, he nodded and bowed to all about him, and seemed greatly

pleased with the attention he excited. His daughter and two other persons brought up the rear." Bernard describes a performance of "The Recruiting Officer" by this company. The gallant Captain Plume was sustained by the manager, who, suffering at the time from a severe attack of gout, as well as of the weight of about seventy years, was discovered, when the curtain drew up, in his elbow-chair, one leg swathed in flannel and resting on a stool. He was attired in a Queen Anne suit of regimentals, and his famous wig was surmounted by a huge cocked hat; all his business consisted in taking snuff and using a very dirty pocket-handkerchief. As the gout had deprived him of all use of his limbs, he could neither make an entrance nor an exit, and when his scene was over, the curtain was lowered and he was wheeled off. Mrs. Penchard—a gushing creature of sixty—doubled 'Sylvia' and 'Captain Brazen.' Mrs. Penchard, now her husband had given up the part, also appeared occasionally as the gallant, gay 'Lothario.'"

What the equipments of these companies were like may be gathered from another description by the same hand. One will serve for all. The scene is Fareham; the theatre is the largest room of an inn. A collection of "green tatters" across the middle forms a curtain, a pair of paper screens are the wings, and four candles represent the footlights. The scenery consists of two drops; one represents

a kitchen, but by the introduction of two chairs and a table it becomes a gentleman's parlour; add to these a crimson cushioned yellow-legged elbow chair, with a banner behind and a stool in front, and it is transformed into a palace. The second drop represents an exterior, which as it pictures two houses, a hill, a dale, a stream, and some trees, may pass for a wood, a landscape, or a street, according to the fancy of the spectator. The company consists of a heavy man, who plays the tyrants in tragedies, and the French horn in the orchestra. Mr. Jackson is manager, prompter, money-taker, scene-painter, machinist, and violinist—he is a company in himself, inasmuch as being letter perfect in every stock play, he can carry on all the mechanical duties of the house, and play ten parts a night with facility *behind the scenes*—a general practice at that time; the Romeo, who is an apothecary by day, sings, and dances hornpipes; there is a “very low” comedian, and the Juliet is Mrs. Jackson, “a fat, fussy, little old woman.”

The benefit was the poor stroller's salvation—and his degradation. Oh! the supplications and the fawnings he had to make, the humiliations he had to undergo to sell a few pounds' worth of tickets! The haughty monarch of the preceding night might be frequently seen panting along a dusty road in pursuit of some gentleman on horseback, to solicit the purchase of a half-crown ticket. But if he had

a wife, such solicitations were usually delegated to her, and on many a rainy, snowy, frosty day, Lady Macbeth or Capulet's daughter had to trudge from door to door delivering the play-bills for the night, and humbly begging the patronage of Mrs. Butcher and Mrs. Grocer, who would snub or condescend, according to their humour. If she had children, they always accompanied her and had a great effect. Ryley relates how the wife of the before-mentioned Bonny Long, as soon as their benefit was announced, would wash her eight children, dress them in scarlet spencers, which made their appearance only upon such occasions, and, upon entering a town, attire herself in Scotch plaid, and with a bundle of play-bills, would knock at every respectable dwelling to solicit patronage, and usually, thanks to the eight "little red run-abouts," obtain a crowded house, which the mother of such a family must have sorely needed. After the play, the performer had to appear before the curtain and servilely return thanks to his "kind patrons," accompanied by his wife and children to curtsy the same. Pater and mater-familias and the eight little red spencers, bowing and curtseying all in a line, must have presented a very curious appearance. Not to have complied with this custom would have given great offence to the little great people of a country town, and the wife of a tragedian being once too ill to walk, he brought

her before the curtain *upon his back*, rather than risk the offence.

These sketches describe only the more respectable strolling companies, those who would learn something of the misery and starvation endured by the lower grades, should read the "Memoirs of Charlotte Charke."

But to return to Roger Kemble and his wife. Their first child, born June 13th, 1755, at Brecon, was christened Sarah; their second, a boy, christened John Philip, was born at Prescott, in Lancashire, in 1757. The old farm-house in which the latter event took place is, it is said, still standing. There came a Stephen in the following year, and other sons and daughters followed in due succession. All these were put upon the stage as soon as they were old enough to speak a few lines,\* and as years advanced, Mr. Roger Kemble's company, like that of Mr. Vincent Crummies, was almost entirely included under one patronymic. Sarah was sent to a day-school in each town where they sojourned; but at thirteen, we find her playing Ariel in a room, or barn, behind the King's Head at Worcester, which boasted

\* Holcroft relates how the future great *tragédienne* was brought forward when a very little thing on her mother's benefit-night as a juvenile prodigy. But the audience did not appreciate her precosity, and laughed and made noises; upon which Mrs. Kemble came forward and adroitly recited the fable of the "Boys and the Frogs," which shamed them into better behaviour.

no other theatre, and four years later sustaining all the principal parts at Wolverhampton. She had then grown to be a very beautiful girl, and made great havoc among the hearts of susceptible squires, and even included an earl among the list of her adorers. But in her father's company there was a handsome young fellow from Birmingham named Henry Siddons, whom she preferred to all her rich admirers. As Mr. and Mrs. Kemble had married against parental consent, it followed as a matter of course that they would not allow their daughter to choose for herself; besides, they had their pride and their ambition, and strongly objected to an alliance with a poor player. So Henry Siddons was told the manager's daughter was not for him. But on his benefit night, he revenged himself by reciting a poem of his own composition, in which he related to the audience the story of his hapless love, and thereby greatly won their sympathies—and a box on the ear from his inamorata's mother, who was listening at the side-scene in a very great passion.

This brought about a disturbance. Siddons left the company, and Sarah went away in a huff, and hired herself as lady's maid to Mrs. Greathead, of Guy's Cliff, Warwickshire. There she did not remain long, for Roger and his wife, finding her determined, and probably moved by the solicitations of their patrons, gave a reluctant consent to the marriage, and on the 6th of November, 1773, Sarah Kemble became Mrs. Siddons.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE KEMBLE FAMILY (*continued.*)

MRS. SIDDONS.

Early Struggles—At Cheltenham—Engaged for Drury Lane—Her London Début—Failure—At Bath—Her “Three Reasons” for quitting it—Back to London—Preparing for the Event—Success—Irish Ridicule—Her Reception at Edinburgh—A Canny Scot—At an Evening Party—A Fashionable Mob.

SOON afterwards the young couple joined the company of Crump and Chamberlain, well-known strolling managers in their day, at Cheltenham; and here for the first time we hear of her being accredited with superior powers as an actress. As Belvidera, in Otway’s “Venice Preserved,” she achieved a great success, and became a *protégée* of all the fashionable play-goers, especially of the Honourable Misses Boyle, who assisted her scanty wardrobe by the loan of dresses, and helped her with their own hands to make new ones. Her fame reached London, and Garrick sent King down to

the Gloucestershire watering-place to take stock of her abilities. He reported very favourably, and soon afterwards Parson Bates, of the *Morning Post*, pugilist, duellist, and critic, a well-known man of the day, took the same journey for a similar purpose, and brought back a warm eulogy upon her acting as Rosalind. Thereupon Roscius engaged her for Drury Lane at £5 a-week. He was delighted at first sight with her beauty and elegant figure, gave her every encouragement, and in the green-room always placed her seat next to his, to the intense annoyance of the other ladies. Her first appearance was in a silent part—Venus, in a revival of the Jubilee Procession, in which she led by the hand little Tom Dibdin, who was Cupid, and supplied him with sweetmeats to keep him from crying. It was on the 29th of December, 1775, she made her real *début*. Here is a copy of the play-bill for that evening:—

·DRURY LANE.

(*Not acted these two years.*)

By His Majesty's Company, at the Theatre Royal, in Drury Lane, this day will be performed,

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Shylock	.	.	.	.	.	Mr. King.
Gratiano	.	.	.	.	.	Mr. Dodd.
Duke .	.	.	.	.	.	Mr. Brambey.
Gobbo	.	.	.	.	.	Mr. Waldron.
Salarino	.	.	.	.	.	Mr. Farren.

---

Antonio . . . . .	Mr. Reddish.
Lorenzo ( <i>with songs</i> ) . . . . .	Mr. Vernon.
Launcelot ( <i>first time</i> ) . . . . .	Mr. Parsons.
Salanio . . . . .	Mr. Fawcett.
Tubal . . . . .	Mr. Messink.
Bassanio . . . . .	Mr. Bensley.
Jessica ( <i>with a song</i> ) . . . . .	Miss Jarratt.
Nerissa . . . . .	Mrs. Davis.
Portia (By a Young Lady), being her first appearance.	

“The young lady” was a failure. Portia was not suited to her, and she was so overpowered by nervousness, that a naturally weak voice sank almost to a whisper; her movements were awkward, her dress old, faded, and in bad taste, as it always was even thereafter, in her great days; there was nothing but a delicate, fragile figure, and a beautiful face to recommend her. Her second part was *Epiccene* in Jonson’s “*Silent Woman*,” another unfortunate choice. In a notice of the performance *The Chronicle* pronounced her to be “entirely destitute of natural fire.” Her third essay was in Parson Bates’s “*Blackamoor washed White*,” which was damned on the first night, and caused a riot on the second, as much in consequence of the unpopularity of its author as its own demerits. The next morning *The Chronicle* said, “All played well except Mrs. Siddons, who having no comedy in her nature, rendered that ridiculous which the author evidently intended to be pleasant.” After this she appeared in Mrs. Cowley’s “*Runaway*,”

and as Mrs. Strickland in "The Suspicious Husband," in which last character, *The Morning Post* said, "she was by no means inferior."

Her last appearance was as Lady Anne to Garrick's Richard; here, again, nervousness paralysed all her powers, she forgot certain directions he had given her at rehearsal, and was reproved for her forgetfulness by a glance from those terrible eyes that nearly made her faint with terror. One of the newspapers, the next morning, pronounced the performance "lamentable." Five nights afterwards Garrick took leave of the stage, and the season closed. He promised to recommend her to Sheridan for the next. Sheridan used afterwards to declare that he took an opposite course, and depreciated her, but the great manager's word was not always to be relied upon. Mrs. Siddons ever after nursed a grudge against Garrick; he had used her as a catspaw against the overweening arrogance of Mrs. Abington, Crawford, and Miss Young;—he was jealous of her, she said. There was probably some truth in the first part of the accusation, but the second is ridiculous; it is probable that he really believed her talents to be only mediocre, a belief shared in by all his company, Mrs. Abington alone excepted, she called them all "fools" in their judgment. The applause of provincial audiences had so inflamed the young actress's vanity, that she believed she would take London by storm; but

her powers were not then ripe, and it must be also confessed that no more unhappy selection of parts could have been made for her.

“It was a stunning and cruel blow,” she says, “overwhelming all my ambitions, and involving peril even to the subsistence of my helpless babes. It was very near destroying me. My blighted prospects, indeed, produced a state of mind that preyed upon my health, and for a year and a half I was supposed to be hastening to a decline.” Her next engagement was at Manchester, and thence she went to York to Tate Wilkinson. There “all lifted up their eyes in astonishment that such a voice and such a judgment should have been neglected by a London audience.” In 1778 John Palmer, on Henderson’s recommendation, engaged her for Bath, at that time the first English theatre out of London, at £3 a week. In her first parts, Lady Townley and Mrs. Candour—Lady Teazle being in possession of another lady—she was only coldly received.

In comedy she failed, as she always was to ; but upon appearing in the sympathetic parts of tragedy her success was at once assured. Four years did she remain in the Western city, and during that time made many friends in good society. Henderson acted with her, and recommended her to Sheridan in the most enthusiastic terms, and the Duchess of Devonshire spread the fame of her talents everywhere she went.

The situation was an arduous one. Palmer was lessee of the Bristol, as well as of the Bath Theatre, and there were journeys backwards and forwards between the two cities to add to the ordinary professional drudgery. "When I recollect all this labour of mind and body," she writes, "I wonder I had the strength and courage to support it, interrupted as I was by the cares of a mother, and by the childish sports of my little ones, who were often most unwillingly hushed to silence for interrupting their mother's studies."

By-and-by there came an offer for one more trial at Drury Lane. But her former failure had left upon her mind so gloomy and bitter an impression, that she had constantly declared she should never desire to act again in London. Telling Palmer, the manager, of her offer, she expressed her readiness to decline it, and remain with him if he would give her some little advance upon her small salary of £3 a week. Strange to say, although she was so great a favourite, he declined to do so. This refusal probably arose from personal feeling; Sarah Siddons was never liked behind the scenes, as we shall see again and again. Her farewell benefit took place on May 12th, 1782. The performance consisted of "The Distressed Mother" (Racine's "Andromaque"), and the "Devil to Pay," in which she played Nell. She also delivered a poetical address, in which she had announced she would give her three reasons for

quitting Bath. At the end of her speech, she went to the wing and brought on her *three* children. She was very fond of the maternal pose, and frequently resorted to it. As a matter of course, the three reasons were received with tumultuous applause. The theatre was crammed; the receipts were £146, and the excitement was tremendous.

Even now Sheridan was only lukewarm over her engagement, and her appearance was put off until the 10th of October. She was in town a fortnight beforehand, preparing and rehearsing in a torture of apprehension, for a second failure would have meant an eternal one, and probably the diminution of her provincial position. The play selected was Southerne's tragedy of "Isabella, or the Fatal Marriage." At the rehearsals the old nervousness again deprived her of voice, until excitement and encouragement gave her strength. Two days before the dreaded night, she was seized with hoarseness, which filled her with terror, but happily it passed away by the next morning.

"On the eventful day," she writes, "my father arrived to comfort me, and be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing-room at the theatre. There he left me, and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities which usually impress me under terrific circumstances, there completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants, without uttering one word, though often

sighing most profoundly." Her husband had not the courage to enter the theatre, but wandered about the streets, or hovered near the playhouse in an agony of suspense. The house was filled, and she was received with a hearty round of applause. "The awful consciousness," she says, "that one is the sole object of attention to that immense space, lined, as it were, with human intellect from top to bottom and all around, may be imagined, but can never be described, and by me can never be forgotten." All doubts, however, were soon set at rest. Her beautiful face and form, the exquisite tones of her voice, her deep tenderness, seized upon every heart, and, as the tragic story advanced, her overwhelming agony thrilled every soul as it had never been thrilled before. Men wept, women fell into hysterics, transports of applause shook the house, the excitement, the enthusiasm was almost terrible in its intensity, and the curtain fell amidst such acclamations as perhaps not even Garrick had ever roused.

In striking contrast with this tumultuous triumph is the home picture that follows :—"I reached my own quiet fireside on retiring from the scene of reiterated shouts and plaudits. I was half dead, and my joy and thankfulness were of too solemn and overpowering a nature to admit of words, or even tears. My father, my husband, and myself sat down to a frugal meat supper in a silence, unin-

interrupted except by exclamations of gladness from Mr. Siddons. My father enjoyed his refreshments, but occasionally stopped short, and laying down his knife and fork, lifting up his venerable face, and throwing back his silver hair, gave way to tears of happiness. We soon parted for the night, and I, worn out with continually broken rest and laborious exertion, after an hour's retrospection (who can conceive the intenseness of that reverie?), fell into a sweet and profound sleep which lasted to the middle of the next day."

The clubs and newspapers were enthusiastic in her praise. The next night the very lobbies were crammed with people of the first fashion—and she was removed from the little shabby tiring room which had been assigned her to what had been Garrick's own splendid dressing-room! Then came the rush. Seats in the boxes not being to be had, ladies hazarded their lives by struggling to gain admittance to the pit. The street in which she lodged was daily crowded with the carriages of the aristocracy; the parties to which she was invited were packed to suffocation. "This actress," says Davies, "like a resistless torrent, has borne down all before her. Her merit seems to have swallowed up all remembrances of present and past performers. . . . The actors assure me that farces that used to raise mirth in an audience after a tragedy, now fail of that effect from Mrs. Siddons having so abso-

lutely depressed their spirits that the best comic actors cannot dispel the gloom."

She appeared as Calista, Jane Shore, Belvidera, Zara, and Euphrasia with ever-increasing success. Mrs. Yates, at the other house, entered the field against her in "The Grecian Daughter," but to no purpose; to the mass of theatre goers there was only one actress in the world, and that was Sarah Siddons! She was divine, angelic, more than human! Some of the newspaper critics were more judicious, and pointed out that her grief in *Isabella* was a little monotonous, that, although the middle and lower notes of her voice were sweet, the higher tones were rather broken and discordant, and that she was deficient in the expression of horror, rage and fury. The salary agreed upon for her services had been five pounds a week, but before the end of the season she was receiving twenty pounds, beside two clear benefits. For her first benefit, a hundred barristers of the Temple subscribed a guinea each. Altogether, for the season, she must have realized about £1,500.

Upon the close of Drury Lane, she went over to Dublin to "star." She was opposed at the Crow Street Theatre by a formidable rival, Mrs. Crawford, who, as the wife of the once supreme favourite Barry, had been enormously popular. The Dublinites rallied around their old love, preferring her to the younger actress.

Mrs. Siddons' visit to the Irish capital was not satisfactory ; she hated the place and the people, and her opinions oozing out were quite sufficient to render her unpopular. The press wrote her down and ridiculed the emotion her performances excited. One of these skits is worth transcribing:—

“ On Saturday Mrs. Siddons, about whom all the world has been talking, exposed her beautiful adamantine, soft, and comely person, for the first time, in the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley. The house was crowded with hundreds more than it could hold, with thousands of admiring spectators that went away without a sight . . . She was nature itself—she was the most exquisite work of art . . . . Several fainted, even before the curtain drew up. . . . The fiddlers in the orchestra blubbered like hungry children crying for their bread and butter, and when the bell rang for music between the acts, the tears ran from the bassoon player's eyes in such showers that they choked the finger-stops, and, making a spout of the instrument, poured in such a torrent upon the first fiddler's book, that not seeing the overture was in two sharps, the leader of the band actually played it in two flats ; but the sobs and sighs of the groaning audience, and the noise of the corks drawn from the smelling-bottles, prevented the mistake being discovered. . . . The briny pond in the pit was three feet deep, and the people that were obliged to stand upon the benches were in that position up to their ankles in tears. An Act of Parliament to prevent her playing will certainly pass, for she has infected the volunteers, and they sit reading ‘The Fatal Marriage,’ crying and roaring all the time. May the curses of an insulted nation pursue the gentlemen of the college, the gentlemen of the bar, and the peers and peeresses that hissed her on the second night. True it is that Mr. Garrick never could make anything of her, and pronounced her below mediocrity ; true it is the London audience did not like her. But what of that ?”

Edinburgh more than recompensed her for these

mortifications. Yet on the first night, the house, although crammed, was freezing; during scene after scene the audience sat mute, and after one of her greatest efforts, a single voice exclaimed from the pit, in a tone of judicial calmness, "That's nae sae bad!" But on her second visit the Scotch went as mad as the Londoners. In one day two thousand five hundred and fifty-seven people applied for the six hundred and fifty seats at the disposal of the management; the doors were besieged at noon, and footmen took their stand at the box entrance as soon as the play was over, to secure their master's places for the following night. Even the church synod arranged its meetings according to her performances.

The *furor* she had created in London during her first seasons increased rather than diminished in the succeeding ones. She was painted as the Tragic Muse, and the great artist inscribed his name upon the hem of the dress. She gave readings at the Palace before the Royal Family, and was lionised at every fashionable assembly. To be made a raree show was not congenial to the tragedy queen's dignity, and, at length, she determined to decline all invitations from strangers. After much persuasion, however, she was prevailed upon to make an exception in favour of a Miss Monkton, the lady assuring her there would be only some half-dozen guests present. After remaining a short

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time she was about to depart, when there arrived such an influx of company that she found it impossible to escape; and there she had to sit in an indescribable state of mortification until the early hours of the morning, to be stared at and interrogated, the people absolutely standing on chairs round the walls to obtain a glimpse of her. Very brusque and very haughty were the answers she gave this fashionable mob to their impertinent questions, as to what parts she esteemed herself most in, whether she studied her attitudes before a looking-glass, whether in Belvidera's mad scene she was really in her senses?

### CHAPTER III.

MRS. SIDDONS (*concluded*).

Studying Lady Macbeth—The Sleep-Walking Scene—The Conservatism of the Old Audience—Her Arrogance and Avariciousness—Unpopularity—A Stormy Reception—In Private Life—Her Prudery—Realised Wishes—Time the Destroyer—Her Farewell—Hazlitt's Description of her Acting—Anecdotes of her Extraordinary Powers—As Volumnia, Calista, Mrs. Beverley—Queen Catherine—Her Final Performances.

ON the second of February, 1784, she played Lady Macbeth for the first time in London.

Let us go back to the time when, little more than a girl, she first studied the part, and listen to her own account of it:—"It was my custom to study my characters at night, when all the domestic cares and business of the day were over. On the night preceding that in which I was to appear in this part for the first time, I shut myself up as usual, when all the family were retired, and commenced my study of Lady Macbeth. As the character is very short, I thought I should soon accomplish it. Being

then only twenty years of age, I believed, as many others do believe, that little more was necessary than to get the words into my head, for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life, had scarcely entered into my imagination. But to proceed. I went on with tolerable composure in the silence of the night (a night I never can forget), till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle, and hurried out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. At last I reached my chamber, where I found my husband fast asleep. I clapt my candlestick down upon the table, without the power of putting the candle out, and I threw myself on my bed, without daring to stay even to take off my clothes. At peep of day I rose to resume my task, but so little did I know of my part, when I appeared in it at night, that my shame and confusion cured me of procrastinating my business for the remainder of my life."

Of her performance of this character I have already given some account in contrasting it with that of Mrs. Pritchard.

There is a story told of the sleep-walking scene

that well depicts the theatrical feeling of the time. Mrs. Pritchard had held the taper in her hand throughout the scene; Mrs. Siddons determined to place it on a table as soon as she entered, that she might go through the pantomime of washing her hands, a piece of business that had never yet been done. Sheridan strongly opposed the idea; it would never do, he said; the audience would not stand such an innovation; it would damn the whole performance. But she would not give in. Even at the last moment, when she was dressing for the part, and had given orders that no one was to approach her room, he insisted upon seeing her, and again expostulated upon the danger of the proposed change. When she set down the taper, a sensation went through the audience, but they were too spell-bound by the wonderful acting to heed the innovation. Such conservatism will seem ridiculous to the indifference of the present day; yet it indicates an artistic feeling, a jealous love of art to which we can now lay no claim.

Her second visit to Dublin, although she was a constant guest of the Lord Lieutenant's, and was everywhere received like a royal personage, produced greater mortification even than her first. Her haughtiness and insolence made her many enemies. Artists were eager to paint her picture, but she declined to sit; she had not time even for Sir Joshua, she answered; and upon one painter,

nettled at her arrogance, making her a brusque reply, she boxed his ears ! A merchant of high standing expressed to Siddons his wish to be introduced to her. Siddons replied he would see what he could do, but he did not know how to break the matter to her ! She was at daggers drawn with Daly, the manager, and all the newspapers attacked her. She was asked to play for a benefit for West Digges, who was paralysed and in indigence ; she refused, on the plea that she had promised to perform on the night named for the Marshalsea prisoners. A burst of indignation came from the press—and then, through her husband, she offered the disabled actor her services. She charged poor Brereton, who was in a similar plight, twenty pounds for playing for his benefit ; made a great virtue of doing it for that ; and afterwards insisted upon his acknowledging in the public prints the favours she had done him.

Reports of her avarice and uncharitableness were soon wafted across the Channel and excited so much popular indignation that upon her reappearance at Drury Lane as Mrs. Beverley, she was received with groans and hisses ; the audience would not have her, and John Kemble was at length obliged to lead her off the stage, when she fainted in his arms. Upon order being restored she returned, made a cleverly worded defence, and was allowed to proceed with the performance. Describing the scene in a letter to a friend she says : “ Envy, malice,

detraction, all the fiends of hell have compassed me round to destroy me; but for my children I would never appear again." Those children were an excuse for everything, for her parsimony, and above all for her inauguration of that pernicious system of strolling throughout the summer in provincial theatres, which has done so much to destroy the dignity of the profession. Before her time a London actor of repute would have considered such strolling or starring a degradation. After the riot, there was a great deal of defending and proving; the people whom she was accused of having treated harshly were brought forward to witness in her favour, and by-and-by the storm blew over. The stories were greatly exaggerated, no doubt, but there was much truth in them. She had no charity even for her own flesh and blood. Years after these events, when she was starring in Manchester, her son Henry wished her to play for his benefit, but afraid to ask her himself, he requested the manager to hand her a letter; "She will be offended if I intrude upon her," he said. Queen Siddons sent for him and haughtily demanded how he could venture to propose such a thing. "I thought, madam," he said, very humbly, "that as Saturday was a vacant night ——" "I dine with the Bishop of Llandaff that evening, and cannot comply with your request," she interrupted, sharply; "Good evening, sir."

Avarice was a family failing. While starrng in Liverpool John promised to go over to York to play one night for his old manager, Tate Wilkinson, for thirty guineas ; but when he found the town all in excitement at the announcement, and that there was likely to be a crowded house, he refused to appear under half the receipts.

After her retirement from the stage, she again refused to act for her son for a less consideration than half the receipts and a clear benefit, although at the time he was manager of the Edinburgh Theatre, and in great difficulties.

Under date 1787, Fanny Burney describes in her Diary her first introduction at a party, to Mrs. Siddons in private life :

“ I found her,” she says, “ the heroine of a tragedy—sublime, elevated and solemn ; in face and person truly noble and commanding ; in manners, quiet and stiff ; in voice, deep and dragging ; and in conversation, formal, sententious, calm, and dry. ✓  
I expected her to have been all that is interesting ; the delicacy and sweetness with which she seizes every opportunity to strike and to captivate upon the stage had persuaded me that her mind was formed with that peculiar susceptibility which, in different modes, must give equal powers to attract and delight in common life. But I was very much mistaken. As a stranger, I must have admired her noble appearance and beautiful countenance, and

have regretted that nothing in her conversation kept pace with their promise."

It was thus she impressed every person. Sarah Siddons was rich in the *one* great virtue which was wanting in so many of her professional sisters—and in no other. She was a grand artiste, but a very disagreeable woman. Her prudery was excessive, her boy's dress in *Rosalind* was a nondescript costume which had no resemblance to that of man or woman, and her acting in the part was on an equality with her costume. One night as she was leaving the theatre, Sheridan jumped into her carriage. "Mr. Sheridan," she said, in her most awful accents, "I hope you will behave with propriety, if not I shall have to call the footman to show you out of the carriage," an expostulation which was certainly more prudish than modest. Bold indeed would have been the man who would have taken the slightest liberty with this terrible tragedy queen.

As the years passed on she still advanced in fame and fortune. She had begun at £5 a week, by 1804 she had advanced to £20 a night, and thence in 1811 to fifty guineas. She had purchased a house in Gower Street, the back of which she describes as being most effectually in the country and most delightfully pleasant. What a change in that neighbourhood since those days. The limit of her ambition had once been £10,000; she had long

since realised that sum more than twice over, but doubtless she would have still gone on accumulating more, had there not come warnings that her days of greatness were waning. She had become very stout and unwieldy, and although her age did not warrant it, so infirm, that after kneeling in a part she had to be assisted to rise. Her acting was becoming heavy, monotonous and stagey; for much of this, however, the increased size of the theatres was responsible; the tenderness, the passion of her younger days had passed away with her youth and beauty, and the *Isabella* and *Belvidera* that once wrung every heart, over which Hazlitt confesses he had wept outright during a whole performance, had no affinity with that fat sombre woman, of whose awful demeanour, even in private life, so many stories have been told.

Another luminary, young, beautiful and sympathetic, Miss O'Neill, was rising to thrust her from her throne as she had thrust others. And so it became necessary to abdicate and lay down the laurel crown she had worn so long, ere it was rudely plucked from her head. "I feel as if I were mounting the first step of a ladder conducting me to the other world," she said, sadly. Her farewell benefit took place on the 29th of June, 1812. *Lady Macbeth* was fitly chosen for her exit, and at the end of the sleep-walking scene, a nobly artistic audience insisted that the curtain

✓ should there fall, so that the last grand impression should not be disturbed. Yet her retirement did not make the sensation that might have been expected. As it has been before said, her powers were failing, and, privately, the public disliked her. A volume might be filled with enthusiastic descriptions of her acting by contemporary writers. None were more warm than that fine critic, Hazlitt, who wrote so much upon this favourite subject :

“The homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to queens,” he said, at her farewell. “The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it; she was regarded less with admiration than with wonder, as if a being of a superior order had dropped from another sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. She raised tragedy to the skies, or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature. We can conceive of nothing grander. She embodied to our imagination the fables of mythology, of the heroic and deified mortals of elder time. She was not less than a goddess, or than a prophetess inspired by the gods. Power was seated on her brow; passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine. She was tragedy personified. She was the stateliest ornament of the public mind. She was not only the idol of the people, she not only hushed the tumultuous shouts of the pit in breathless expectation, and quenched the blaze of surrounding

beauty in silent tears, but to the retired and lonely student, through long years of solitude, her face has shone as if an angel appeared from heaven; her name has been as if a voice had opened the chambers of the human heart, or as if a trumpet had awakened the sleeping and the dead. To have seen Mrs. Siddons was an event in every one's life; and does she think we have forgot her?"

"To see the bewildered melancholy of Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep," writes Leigh Hunt, "or the widow's mute stare of perfect misery by the corpse of the gamester Beverley, two of the sublimest pieces of acting on the English stage, would argue this point (the greatness of her powers) better than a thousand critics. Mrs. Siddons has the air of never being an actress; she seems unconscious that there is a motley crowd, called the pit, waiting to applaud her, or that a dozen fiddlers are waiting for her exit."

Her "Forgive me, but forgive me!" in Jane Shore would convulse the house with sobs. Crabb Robinson, while witnessing her terrible performance in "Fatal Curiosity," burst into a peal of laughter, and upon being removed, was found to be in strong hysterics.

Macready relates an equally remarkable instance of her power. In the last act of Rowe's "Tamerlane," when by the order of the tyrant Monesis, Aspasia's lover is strangled before her face, she

worked herself up to such a pitch of agony that, as she sank a lifeless heap before the murderer, the audience remained for several moments awe-struck, then clamoured for the curtain to fall, believing that she was really dead, and only the earnest assurances of the manager to the contrary, could satisfy them. Holman and the elder Macready were among the spectators, and looked aghast at one another. "Macready, do I look as pale as you?" inquired the former.

"From the first moment to the last," says Young, "she was, according to theatrical parlance, in the character. The spectator was always carried along with her—wept when she wept, smiled when she smiled, and each motion of her heart became in turn his own. . . . I remember her coming down the stage, in 1789, in the triumphal entry of her son, Coriolanus, when her dumbshow drew plaudits that shook the building. She came alone, marching and beating time to the music; rolling (if that be not too strong a term to describe her motion) from side to side, swelling with the triumph of her son. Such was the intoxication of joy which flashed from her eyes, and lit up her whole face, that the effect was irresistible. She seemed to me to reap all the glory of that procession to herself. I could not take my eyes from her. Coriolanus, banner, and pageant, all went for nothing to me, after she had walked to her place."

Washington Irving did not see her until she was old and had lost all elegance of figure. (She was playing Calista) yet, he says, she penetrated in a moment to his heart; she froze and melted it by turns, a glance of her eye, a start, an exclamation thrilled his whole frame—he hardly breathed while she was on the stage, and she worked upon his feelings until he felt himself a mere child. She frequently produced the most astonishing effect upon the actors performing with her. In the last scene of “The Gamester” one night, Young, who was playing Beverley, was so choked with emotion at her acting, that for a time he could not speak. In Queen Catherine, her glance at the Surveyor was so terrible that once an actor who was performing the part came off the stage terror-struck, and vowed that he would not encounter that look again for the world.

I have already given some sketches of her in private life; her arrogant pride greatly increased with years. Irving said that she reminded him of one of Scott’s knights, “who carved the meat with their glaives of steel, and drank the red wine through their helmets barred.” She would make the stipulation before promising to dine with a friend, that no other person should be invited, and if by chance she found any visitors upon her arrival, would cast upon the host one of her most terrible glances, and be rude and disagreeable all the evening. At one of her receptions, she was observed standing next to

the Duke of Wellington, silent, and with a haughty look upon her face, waiting for him *to speak first*.

It must have been a great renunciation to have retired from those dazzling triumphs into the monotony of private life. As she sat at home in the long evenings, she would say, "Now I used to be going to dress—now the curtain is about to rise." Her body was there, but her soul was still before the footlights. In 1817, she reappeared as Lady Macbeth for her brother Charles's benefit. But Macready, who was present, says, the performance only excited regret that she should have been prevailed upon to leave her retirement—that her acting was a mere repetition of the poet's text without one flash or sign of "her pristine all-subduing genius." Yet even this was not her last appearance; in 1819, she again appeared, on a similar occasion, as Lady Randolph. Macready witnessed this also. There was one gleam of the original brightness, he says, when confronting Glenalvon's foul suspicion, she came to the lines :

" 'Thou look'st at me as if thou fain would'st pry  
Into my heart. . . .  
'Tis open as my speech.'"

"The effect was electric, and the house responded with peals of applause. But this was as the last flicker of a dying flame; no flash enlightened the succeeding scenes."

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She received the homage of the great unto the last, and when she lodged in town, files of carriages were nearly all day drawn up before the door of her lodgings. She survived until the year 1831, still continuing to delight select circles, even royal ones, with her fine private readings of Shakespeare and Milton. She died worth £35,000.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE KEMBLE FAMILY (*concluded*).

JOHN PHILIP, STEPHEN, CHARLES AND FANNY KEMBLE.

John Philip intended for a Priest—Forsakes the Cassock for the Buskin—Anecdotes of his Strolling Days—An Old and Young Stager—At Dublin—First Appearances in London—His Hamlet—Strange Courtship and Wedding—A Bed of Thorns—"Old Madame Drury"—The New Theatre—Manager of Covent Garden—The Fire—The O. P. Riots—Kemble's Companies—His Farewell—His Retirement—An Analysis of his Acting—Stephen—Charles—Fanny Kemble.

JOHN PHILIP as a child acted like the rest of his brothers and sisters, but after a time his father resolved to make a priest of him. Roger was a Catholic and brought up the boys to that faith, the girls following the Protestant religion of their mother. So at ten years old the boy was sent away to Sedgley Park College, Wolverhampton. There he remained four years, and in 1771 proceeded to Douai, where he was famous as a declaimer of tragic recitations, and for a prodigious memory, which never failed him through life.

He once undertook to get two books of Homer

by heart, and actually repeated fifteen hundred lines. But the theatrical blood within him rebelled against the cassock, and burned for the sock and buskin. So he left the College in 1775, landed at Bristol, and proceeded to Brecknock, where his parents were then performing. Bitterly disappointed in his ambition, Roger refused to receive his disobedient son; a subscription of a few shillings was raised among the company, to which the irate father was with difficulty induced to add a guinea, and with this pittance John Philip had the world before him. He started on foot for Wolverhampton, where his sister's late managers, Crump and Chamberlain, had opened the theatre. On the road he fell in with another wandering disciple of Thespis wending his way to the same town. On Christmas Day they found themselves at an inn without a penny in their pockets. They composed two letters, one in Latin to a parson, the other in English to a lawyer—charitable persons, we may presume, and known as such—in which they stated their destitute circumstances and solicited assistance. The appeal was responded to, and with the funds thus obtained the journey was completed. But upon their arrival at Wolverhampton one was received, the other rejected, and the rejected one, alas, was John Philip. After a few days, however, the theatrical potentates were induced to reconsider their determination, and on the 8th of January,

1776, Kemble appeared as Theodosius. He did not make a favourable impression, and was evidently what, in expressive stage parlance, is called "a stick." But he was studious and painstaking, and made a progress in his art which, if not rapid, was sure. His stay at Wolverhampton was very short, he and the managers, two *not* very worthy men, could not agree, and he threw up the engagement. Then began a life of strolling of which many stories, true or apocryphal, are told, how he frequently had to dine off raw turnips pulled out of the fields: how, in one town, not being able to pay his lodgings, and not knowing how to get away his few effects, he hit upon the extraordinary idea of whipping a top over his sick landlady's head until he was turned out of the house—which was exactly what he wanted—and many others to the same effect. Then he associated himself with an itinerant conjuror.

Lewis, the comedian, used frequently to relate that while "starring" some little time after this in a country town, he was greatly struck by a young man who was playing Lovewell in "The Clandestine Marriage," who although attired in a very ridiculous dress, was so correct and gentlemanly in his acting and bearing, that such shortcomings were lost sight of. He found him to be a Mr. John Kemble, and that he was associated with a person who exhibited tricks of legerdemain. This life he endured about

two years, until his sister, in 1778, procured him an engagement at Liverpool ; but, in the same year, probably by the same recommendation, he joined Tate Wilkinson at York. There all the great leading parts were in possession of a veteran actor named Cummings, who played the gay Charles Surface at sixty. The audience pronounced Kemble "very good in his way, but nothing to Coomins;" against whose stentorian lungs he could not shout, and the press advised him, if he desired to attain eminence in his profession, to study that gentleman's style. It would have been considered a sacrilege for any other actor to have played the parts in which the favourite was identified. Once upon a bespeak night a servant of the patron's refused to go to the theatre because "that Kemble was playing one of Mr. Coomins' parts."

Poor Cumming's end was a singular one ; while playing Dumont in "Jane Shore," just as he had uttered the line, "be witness for me, ye celestial hosts !" he staggered and dropped down dead upon the stage. Actors had much to endure in those days. There was a certain influential "lady" at York who took a delight in insulting them upon the stage. One night, when Kemble was performing some tragic part, she disconcerted him so much by loud laughter and ridicule, that he was compelled to address her and say he could not go on until she desisted. Some officers who were in the box with

her cried out she had been insulted, and demanded an apology. Kemble refused to make any. There was a great uproar, but the tragedian remained firm. The next day these gentlemen called upon the manager, and informed him that, unless the actor was dismissed, they and their friends would withdraw their patronage, and compel their tradesmen to do likewise. The manager replied spiritedly that he had always found Mr. Kemble a gentleman, that he considered he was in the right, and should not think of discharging him. Such a determination produced great excitement and astonishment in the city, but after a time the audience came over to the side of the actor, and the storm blew over.

From York John Philip proceeded to Dublin. Here, again, he appears to have made little impression, for the audience still remembered Barry, and were loath to accept any one in his place. He worked indefatigably, played a round of some thirty-eight characters belonging to every range of the drama, and, although never esteemed in comedy parts, gradually won his way as a tragedian, until his performance as the Count, in Jephson's "Count of Narbonne," raised him to be an established favourite in the Irish capital.

It was in the season of 1783, that Mrs. Siddons' influence brought him to London. He made his first appearance on the 12th of September, as Hamlet. His reception in no degree approached

that of his sister, and it brought forth much conflicting criticism upon his new readings, which were many and strange. The performance was eminently graceful, calm, deeply studied—during his life he wrote out the entire part forty times!—but cold and unsympathetic. Nevertheless, it was felt that a fine artist had appeared, and with the exception of Henderson he had at the time no rival in the highest walk of tragedy.

“Old playgoers,” says Dr. Doran, “have told me of a grand delivery of the soliloquies of Hamlet, and mingled romance and philosophy in the whole character; an eloquent by-play, a sweet reverence for his father, a remembrance of the *Prince* with whatever companion he might be for the moment; of a beautiful filial affection for his mother, and of one more tender, which he could *not* conceal, for Ophelia.” Hazlitt when reviewing his performance of this character, among several others, years afterwards, upon the great actor’s retirement, complained of its want of flexibility. There is a perpetual undulation of feeling in the character of Hamlet; but in Mr. Kemble’s acting “there was neither variableness, nor the shadow of turning. He played it like a man in armour, with a determined inveteracy of purpose, in one undeviating straight line.” But, when noticing his death six years later, the great critic writes more praisingly, “there he was, the sweet, the graceful, the gentlemanly

Hamlet. The scholar's eye shone in him with learned beauty ; the soldier's spirit decorated his person, the beauty of its performance was its retrospective air, its intensity and abstraction ; his youth seemed delivered over to sorrow. Later actors have played the part with more energy, walked more in the sun—dashed more at effect—piqued themselves more on the girth of a foil ; but Kemble's *sensible, lonely* Hamlet has not been surpassed."

Unlike his sister, who never exceeded the greatness of her first performances and degenerated in her later years, Kemble was a progressive actor, constantly improving until the very last. But the old theatrical law of precedence which had hampered him with "Coomins" at York, again kept him back at Drury Lane, where the principal tragic parts were in possession of "Gentleman Smith," the original Charles Surface, who, although an excellent light comedian, was certainly very unfit for tragedy. Nevertheless, he played Macbeth to Mrs. Siddons on her first appearance in that part.

In 1787, Kemble married Brereton's young widow, *née* Hopkins. She survived him many years, dying at ninety, in 1845, and could then boast herself as having been a member of Garrick's company. The courtship was very brief and very unromantic. He had always evinced a partiality for the young lady, even before her marriage ; but one night as he was coming off the stage, meeting her in the wing, he

chucked her under the chin, and with a pleasant smile said, "Pop, you may shortly learn something to your advantage." "Pop," the familiar name by which Mrs. Brereton was known among her friends, ran to her mother, who was also an actress in the same theatre, told her what had happened, with "I wonder what he meant?" "Why he means to make you an offer of marriage to be sure," replied the old lady, "and you'll of course accept it." Mrs. Hopkins was right, the offer was made, accepted, and the wedding quietly celebrated. When the ceremony was over, Mrs. Bannister, who was present, inquired of the bridegroom where he was going to dine. He did not know, he answered; he supposed at home. The good lady invited them to her house. He accepted the invitation, then went away upon some business. He was so late for dinner that they thought he had forgotten all about it. He took his wife to the theatre at night, and as he did not play himself, returned to spend the evening with her friends. After the play was over, he fetched her home to his new house in Caroline Street, Bedford Square, and so ended the day.

In the next year, he succeeded King as stage-manager. Since the death of Garrick, Drury Lane had been under the management of Brinsley Sheridan. Alas, what a falling off was there! To what a chaos that once admirably conducted establish-

ment had been reduced years previous to this! Sheridan's carelessness and impecuniosity had reduced the stage accessories to a condition which would now scarcely be tolerated in a booth at a fair. And Kemble set to work not only to renovate them, but to introduce into scenery and dresses an appropriateness never before attempted.\* There was a grand revival of *Macbeth*, of *Coriolanus* (with some of Thomson's alterations) and of *Henry VIII.*; and for the first time in the history of the stage, the scene-painter and the costumier came into competition with the actor. In *Henry VIII.*, Bensley being in possession of *Cardinal Wolsey*, Kemble played *Cromwell*, doubling *Griffith* with it.

His new position was a bed of thorns; tradespeople refused credit unless he himself became answerable, sometimes Sheridan neglected to honour the debt, and once Kemble was arrested; the actors were unpaid and rebellious, and frequently refused to go on the stage until they received their night's salary; more than once even, Kemble and his sister were driven to such degrading means to obtain money. One night, patience and temper now utterly exhausted, at a supper at Mrs.

\* Yet the first time he played *Othello* in London, it was in the full uniform of a British General; and he continued to appear in *Macbeth* with a hearse-like plume in his bonnet until Walter Scott plucked it out and substituted a single eagle's feather; while the celebrated singer, Mrs. Crouch, appeared as the first Singing Witch in powdered hair, fancy hat, and point lace.

Crouch's, John Philip gave in his resignation; the words in which it was couched are highly characteristic. After much preliminary growling he burst forth: "I am an eagle, whose wings have been bound down by frosts and snows; but I now shake my pinions and cleave into the genial air unto which I am born!" But Sheridan, who was his idol, and whose power over men was something marvellous, succeeded in again cajoling him.

Old Drury Lane was pulled down in 1791. The following *jeu d'esprit* was written by Colman upon the last performance, which took place on June 4th.

"Died on Saturday night of a gradual decay, in the hundred and seventeenth year of her age, old Madame Drury who lived in six reigns and saw many generations pass in review before her. She remembered Betterton in age, lived in intimacy with Booth, Wilkes and Cibber, and knew old Macklin when he was a stripling; her hospitality exceeded that of the English character, even in its earliest days of festivity, having almost through the whole of her life entertained from one to two thousand persons of both sexes six nights out of seven in the week; she was an excellent poetess, could be gay and grave by turns, and sometimes catching disorders from intrusive guests, could be dull enough in all conscience; her memory was excellent, and her singing kept in such a gradual state of improvement, that it was allowed her voice was

better the three or four last years of her life than when she was in her prime. At the latter end of the last century, she had a rout of nearly two thousand people at her house the very night of her death; and the old lady felt herself in such spirits, that she said she would give them *no supper without a song*, which being complied with, she fell gently back in her chair, and expired without a groan. Dr. Palmer, one of her family physicians, attended her in her last moments and announced her dissolution to the company."

New Drury was opened March 12, 1794, with an Oratorio, the stage being splendidly set to represent a Gothic Cathedral. The dimensions of the house were:—the opening of the curtain forty-three feet, height thirty-eight; height from pit to ceiling fifty-six. The pit held 800 people, the boxes 1828, the two-shilling gallery 675, the one shilling 308: total 3,611, and £1,771. The old house held about 2,000 people and £800. In 1796 Kemble gave up the management and Wroughton succeeded him. He resumed the position, however, in 1800, under an agreement with Sheridan that he was to take a share of the profits; but finding that the manager intended to evade the bargain, he in disgust once more, and this time for ever, in 1802 dissolved his connection with him. In the same year he bought Lewis's sixth share in Covent Garden for £23,000, borrowing half the money on interest.

He was now in the very zenith of his fame ; from the time he had assumed the direction of Drury Lane he took the position of principal actor, and performed one after another that series of parts with which his name became identified—Macbeth, King John, Wolsey, the Stranger, Rolla, Brutus, Cato, and greatest of all, Coriolanus. He had mounted Garrick's throne, and there was none to dispute the sceptre with him.

Before appearing at Covent Garden, he paid a visit to Paris where he was well received, although his reception could not compare with that of Garrick. During his absence his wife was the guest of the Marquis of Abercorn. He re-appeared in London on September 24th, 1803.

Within six years afterwards Covent Garden was burned to the ground. Kemble and his sister lost all they possessed. "Everything I had in the world of stage ornament," she wrote to Lady Holland, "is gone, and literally not one vestige is left of all that has cost me so much time and money to collect."

Boaden describes Kemble the morning after the fire sitting before a glass gloomily pretending to shave, then suddenly bursting forth into soliloquy, bewailing the magnificent theatre that had perished, enumerating with auctioneer precision its various treasures, library, wardrobe, scenery, and ending with "Of all this nothing now remains but the

arms of England over the entrance of the theatre, and the Roman Eagle standing solitary in the market place !” But generous friends came to his assistance. The Duke of Northumberland pressed upon him a loan of £10,000, and on the day the foundationstone of the new house was laid, destroyed the bond.

Within eight months the building was completed. But new troubles now beset him. On account of the great expenses of the new theatre Kemble considered himself justified in raising the prices of admission ; the box price was advanced from six to seven shillings, the pit from three shillings and sixpence to four shillings, and a third tier of boxes were erected and let for £12,000 a year.

The announcement of these alterations made a great sensation out of doors, the newspapers grew virtuously indignant over the private boxes, and Bull patriotism was aroused by the engagement of Madame Catalani, whose enormous salary, it was said, was the cause of all. The new theatre was opened on September 18th, with “ Macbeth ” and “ The Quaker.” As Kemble, after “ God save the King,” stepped forward to speak the opening address, the storm burst. Barking of dogs, cat-calls, cries of “ Off, off ! ” “ Old prices,” resounded through the house. Not one word either of the address or the play was heard, and every actor and actress was hissed. The Riot Act was read from

the stage, constables and soldiers were called in, but could not dislodge the disturbers. The newspapers next morning took the side of the rioters, and were filled with skits and satires upon Kemble and his sister. For six nights the performances were conducted in dumb show, amidst groans, ✓ hisses, bugle-calls, and every variety of hideous cacophony. Pugilists were sent into the pit, people were dragged to the police office, but still the riot, far from being subdued, nightly increased in violence. After the sixth night Kemble arranged to defer the dispute to a committee, and announced that Madame Catalani had resigned her engagement. The committee selected was composed of the Solicitor-General, the Recorder of the City of London, and the Governor of the Bank of England. Their report set forth that during the last six years the yearly profits of the theatre had amounted to only  $6\frac{3}{8}$  per cent. upon the capital, and that the proprietors had sustained a heavy loss by the late fire, on account of the property having been only partially insured. The receipts during those six years had been £365,983, the expenditure £307,912, and there were twelve shareholders in the patent. The house reopened on the 10th of October, but far from the report satisfying the public, the riots recommenced with greater fury than before. Men wore the letters O. P. upon their hats and waist-coats, ladies wore O. P. medals; dustman's bells,

watchmen's rattles, coachmen's horns, and a kind of Carmagnole, called the O. P. dance, drowned every word the actors spoke. After bravely struggling against these monstrous proceedings for sixty-one nights, Kemble was obliged to lower the pit to the old price, do away with the private boxes, stop all prosecutions, and dismiss his box-keeper, Brandon, whose only fault had been doing his duty.

The Kemble management certainly did not tend to the elevation of the stage; the vast size of the new theatres, so different to the old, which were quite small, induced him to create that spectacular drama which has since swollen to such enormous dimensions. Splendid processions, real water, horses, elephants, dogs, too frequently possessed the stage. Even in these days we would not tolerate much that drew eager crowds to the patent houses, when the Kembles and a host of other talent graced the boards. The importance given to the quadruped actors was particularly degrading, and was severely commented on by the press.

Yet they gathered about them some noble artistes; from 1809 to 1821 such names as these were to be found in their companies: in Tragedy—Kemble, Cooke, Macready, Young, Charles Kemble, Conway, Betty, Terry, Abbot, Egerton, Barrymore; Mesdames Siddons, O'Neil, Bunn, Powell, Smith, Fawcett. In Comedy—Munden, J. Johnstone, Liston, Jones, C. Kemble, W. Farren, Fawcett, Blanchard, Mathews, Terry, Emery, Farley, Yates,

Tokely, Simmons ; Mesdames Jordan, Davison, O'Neill, Brunton, Gibbs, C. Kemble, H. Johnstone, Foote, Davenport. In Opera—Braham, Incledon, Sinclair, Bellamy, Phillips, Pyne, Broadhurst, Taylor, Hunt, Duruset ; Mesdames Catalani, Dickens, Stephens, M. Tree, Bolton, Fearon, Mathews, Carew, Liston, Holland, Love. Pantomime and Ballet—Noble, Byrne, Farley, Grimaldi, sen. and jun., Bologna, Norman, Ellar.

With the quadruple company for tragedy, comedy, opera and ballet, the expenses of Covent Garden were £300 a-night. Between 1809 and 1821 inclusive, the receipts were £1,000,000 which averaged £80,000 per season. In 1810-11 £100,000 was taken, and for the first forty-one nights of "Blue Beard" £21,000.

During the latter part of his career, John Philip was absent for two years from the stage. When he returned, he was received with a great ovation, but, warned by increasing infirmities, the martyrdom he suffered from the gout, and, above all, the success of Edmund Kean, he, in 1817, gave a round of his great parts, *Pierre*, *Brutus*, *Cato*, *The Stranger*, *Lord Townley*, *Penruddock*, *Hotspur*, *Hamlet*, *Zanga*, *Wolsey*, *Octavian*, *Posthumus*, to £600 houses. His last appearance was on June 23rd in the above year.

"Mr. Kemble took his leave of the stage on Monday night in the character of *Coriolanus*,"

writes Hazlitt. "On his first coming forward to pronounce his farewell address, he was received with a shout like thunder; on his retiring after it the applause was long before it subsided entirely away. There is something in these partings with old public favourites exceedingly affecting. They teach us the shortness of human life, and the vanity of human pleasures. Our associations of admiration and delight with theatrical performers are among our earliest recollections, among our last regrets. They are links that connect the beginning and the end of life together; *their* bright and giddy career of popularity measures the arch that spans our brief existence. . . . He played the part as well as he ever did—with as much freshness and vigour. There was no abatement of spirit and energy—none of grace and dignity; his look, his action, his expression of the character, were the same as they ever were, they could not be finer."

I continue the description of the scene from Mr. Fitzgerald's biography of "The Kembles:"

"Kemble seemed to put his whole soul into the part, and, it was noticed, seemed to cast away all unfavourable checks and reserves, as though there was no further need for husbanding his strength. As he approached the last act a gloom seemed to settle down on the audience; and when at the end he came forward slowly to make his address, he was greeted with a shout like thunder of 'No

farewell!' it was long before he could obtain silence, or could control his feelings sufficiently to speak. At last he faltered out, 'I have now appeared before you for the last time: this night closes my professional life.' At this a tremendous tumult broke out, with cries of 'No, no!' and after an interval he went on with the remainder of his speech. . . . At the end he seemed to hurry over what he had to say, to be eager to finish, and withdrew with a long and lingering gaze just as Garrick had done. Some one handed a wreath to Talma,\* to which was attached an inscription, bearing a request that Mr. Kemble would not retire, but would act at least a few times in the year, so long as his strength would allow him. Kemble, however, had withdrawn, but the manager (Fawcett) coming out, assured them that it should be his pride to present it to Mr. Kemble. But in the green-room he received an unexpected shape of homage, for all his brother artists begged from him the various articles of his theatrical dress as memorials. Mathews obtained his sandals, Miss Bristow his pocket-handkerchief, and, when he at last withdrew from the theatre, he found the entrances lined with all the assistants and supernumeraries, waiting to give him a last greeting." A grand dinner was given in his honour at the Freemason's Tavern, Lord Holland in the chair; the Marquis of Lansdowne, the Duke of

\* Talma was present on the occasion.

Bedford, and others of the highest nobility, together with the most eminent men in literature and art were present. Not even Garrick had been so greatly honoured. His savings had been but moderate, and he found it necessary to sell his fine library, which realised £2,271, and his unique collection of old plays, which the Duke of Devonshire purchased for £2,000. These sales added £300 a-year to his income. He left his house in Great Russell Street, which was pulled down for the enlargement of the British Museum, and went abroad, first to Toulouse, and afterwards to Lausanne, where he had a charming villa, and was occasionally visited by old friends travelling. Once he returned to London for a short time, and from Hazlitt we obtain a last glimpse of the great actor in his decay: "His face was as fine and as noble as ever, but he sat in a large arm-chair, bent down, dispirited, and lethargic. He spoke no word, but he sighed heavily, and after drowsing thus for a time, went away."

He died at Lausanne in 1823.

It is doubtful whether, could John Kemble be resuscitated and brought back to the stage in all the fulness of his powers, a modern audience would appreciate him. "When witnessing," writes Irving, "the exertion of his powers, though my head is satisfied and even astonished, yet my heart is seldom affected. I am not led to forget that it is Kemble

the actor, not Othello the Moor. Once, I must own, however, I was completely overpowered by his acting; it was in the part of Zanga; he was great throughout. But his last scene with Alcnzo was truly sublime; Kemble seemed to have forgotten himself for a moment and to have found himself Zanga." His Cato was magnificent, "the hope of Rome seemed fixed upon him in his tower-like person." But his Brutus was too meditative. In Coriolanus the mob fell back from him as though they had run against a wild bull, as he dashed in among them in haughty pride, looking sufficient to beat forty of them. And while waiting for Aufidius at the foot of the statue of Mars he looked another Mars.

"The distinguishing excellence of his acting may be summed up in the word *intensity*, in the seizing upon some one feeling or idea, in insisting upon it, with a certain graceful consistency, and conscious grandeur of conception, to a very high degree of pathos or sublimity. If he had not the unexpected bursts of nature and genius, he had all the regularity of art; if he did not display the tumult and conflict of opposite passions in the soul, he gave in the deepest and most permanent interest to the uninterrupted progress of individual feeling: and in embodying a high idea of certain characters, which belong rather to sentiment than passion, to energy of will than to loftiness or originality of imagination,

he was the most excellent actor of his time."

"John Kemble is a great artist," wrote Walter Scott, "but he shows too much of his machinery. I wish he could be double-capped, as they say of watches. *He is great in those parts where character is tinged* by some acquired and systematic habit, like stoicism or misanthropy; but sudden turns and natural bursts of passion are not his forte. I saw him in Sir Giles Overreach the other night, and he is not within two miles of Cooke."

"His person was cast in the heroic mould, and, as may be seen in Lawrence's splendid portraits of him in Coriolanus, Hamlet, and Rolla, reached the most perfect ideal of manly beauty. But he had serious disadvantages to contend with in a very disagreeable voice, husky and untunable, and in a constitutional asthma that necessitated a prolonged and laborious indraught of his breath, and obliged him for the sake of distinctness to adopt an elaborate mode of utterance, enunciating every letter in every word. His limbs were not supple—indeed, his stately bearing verged on stiffness; and his style, more suited to the majestic, the lofty, and the stern than the pathetic, might not inaptly, in respect to his movements on the stage, be termed statuesque. Mrs. Siddons, speaking of him to Reynolds, the dramatist, said, "My brother John, in his most impetuous bursts is always careful to to avoid any discomposure of his dress or deport-

ment ; but in the whirlwind of passion I lose all thought of such matters."

He was terribly pedantic. Leigh Hunt describes how he turned his head so slowly that people might have imagined he had a stiff neck, while his words followed so slowly that he might have been reckoning how many words he had got by heart. The actors who played with him were forbidden to use any exertion for fear of marring his effects.

How badly he could act was evinced by the "Iron Chest" fiasco. His excuse was that he was suffering from illness. "Frogs in a marsh, flies in a bottle, wind in a crevice, a preacher in a field, the drone of a bagpipe, all yielded to the inimitable soporific monotony of Mr. Kemble," wrote George Colman in his famous preface to the play. John Philip would not condescend to act if either his part or his audience displeased him. Macready saw him play Othello in Dublin without one spark of feeling and without one round of applause. In comedy, his pedantry was more offensive than even in his tragedy. A wit remarked of his Don Felix that there was too much of the Don and too little of the Felix. His Charles Surface was called Charles's Martyrdom, and a gentleman who was about to challenge him for some offence, waived satisfaction on condition that he would promise never to repeat that performance. Lamb, however, was of a different opinion, and speaks highly of him both

in this part, and all others of artificial comedy. "No man," he says, "could deliver brilliant dialogue half as well." His eccentric pronunciation of certain words is well known. Virtue became *vartue*, hideous, *hijus*, bird, *beard*, earth, *airth*, mercy, *maircy*, Rome, *Room*, aches, *aitches*. These peculiarities were made the subject of endless satires.

Even in his most convivial hours Kemble was solemn and funereal. Reynolds gives a capital description of his behaviour at one of the Theatrical Fund Dinners. Parsons told a story which set off every one in a roar, but John remained grave and unmoved. Immediately afterwards, Dodd sang a pathetic ballad, in the midst of which Kemble burst into a fit of laughter, "I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said, "but I have just taken Parsons' joke, it is very good." After this he was called upon for a song. "Gentlemen," he said, "I will most cheerfully give you the song of 'The Gods and Goddesses Hunting the Hare;' but if I produce any humorous effects in it, which I think I shall, you will please ascribe it to the hints I have received from one of the best comic singers of the day—I beg leave to state I allude to Mrs. Siddons." Fancy awful Sarah Siddons as a comic singer. She did occasionally favour a select circle with "Billy Taylor," and must have been about as comic, as the *memento mori* of an Egyptian feast. In society Kemble was perpetually holding forth upon his

one all absorbing topic—himself. At a Royal Academy Dinner he was discussing certain new readings with Scott, who sat next to him, when the great silver chandelier above their heads was seen slowly descending; everybody sprang to their feet except John Philip, who remained immovable, and he afterwards rebuked Scott for interrupting his explanations.

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After dwelling so long upon the two great names, the other members of the Kemble family must be briefly dismissed.

Stephen became a strolling manager and went through all the vicissitudes of the actor's life. He made his first appearance in London, at Covent Garden as Othello, about the same time as John, but created no impression. After his brother's retirement from Drury Lane, he played Falstaff three times with some success. But it would seem that the principal merit of the performance was that his enormous size enabled him to play Sir John without stuffing. His son Henry appeared at Drury Lane in 1819 as Romeo, but took no position. Stephen died in 1822. There were three sisters, all of whom made appearances upon the stage, one a not very reputable personage, under the pseudonym of "Anne of Swansea," had some favour in her day as a novelist.

Charles, the youngest, was born at Brecknock in

1775. Like his brother John, he was educated at Douai; he afterwards obtained an appointment in the Post Office. But it was not to be expected that a Kemble could be anything but an actor. So Charles threw up his situation, and appeared at the Theatre Royal, Sheffield, in 1792, as Orlando. His first appearance in London was as Malcolm in his brother's great revival of Macbeth, in 1794. He married Miss De Camp, a French lady who had been brought up as a dancer. John Philip once made such violent love to her that he had to publicly apologise in the newspapers. She is still remembered by an old farce, still frequently inflicted upon the public as a *lever de rideau*, "The Day after the Wedding," and was a very excellent actress. Charles himself was the finest Romeo of the present century, the most delightful of Mirabels, Petruccios, Doricourts, Mercutios, and the most admirable of Laertes, Bassanios, and Cassios. Macready well describes him as a first rate actor in second rate parts. He was a passable Hamlet; but in the Macbeths and Othellos, which, with the usual perversity of actor-nature he desired to play, he scarcely rose to mediocrity. In tragedy, save in such parts as those named, he was cold and stilted, with all the worst faults of his great brother and none of his grandeur; there was, besides, at most times, a languor in his style which greatly detracted from its merits.

In 1821 his brother John made over to him his share of Covent Garden. The gift was not a happy one, for it nearly ruined him. He retired from the stage in 1836; but returned to play for the Princess Victoria. His last appearance was for his daughter's benefit in 1840. Upon the death of Colman, he was appointed examiner of plays. He died in 1854. "Poor Charles Kemble," writes Lady Morgan, when recording his death. "I knew the whole dynasty of the Kembles, from King John downwards; Charles was the last and best of the whole stock, beautiful, graceful, gallant, and a very fine gentleman; such he was when I first knew him."

In 1829 his daughter Fanny made her first appearance at Covent Garden. The inheritor of a famous name, there was a double interest attached to the event when it became known that, not intended for the stage, she had come upon it as an endeavour to save the sinking fortunes of the theatre. Never had these been in so desperate a condition, warrants were out for £896 for parish rates, while the King's tax-gatherer was in possession for £600. A subscription fund was organised, Laporte gave the use of the King's Theatre, and a performance there brought to it £750. But the grand *coup* was made by the lessee's daughter, who was then only in her seventeenth year. She appeared as Juliet; Abbot was the Romeo, Mrs. Kemble, after

years of retirement, played Lady Capulet, in order to introduce the young *débutante* to the audience; Charles Kemble performed Mercutio, for the first time. The young lady made a great sensation, the press went into raptures, the houses were nightly filled to overflowing to her Juliet, Euphrasia, Belvidera, Mrs. Beverly, &c., and at the close of the season her father was enabled to pay off £13,000 of the debt that was crushing him. But when the cause and the novelty of Miss Kemble's *début* had ceased, a juster estimate was formed of her abilities, which far from being phenomonal were only commonplace; people began to perceive that she thought more of a pretty pose than of the words she was delivering, that drawling did not constitute pathos, nor deep tones passion. The lady has since revenged this reversal of public opinion by scornful diatribes against the profession which gave her and her family all their position. But for the stage the Kembles might have been a generation of barbers, instead of the honoured associates of the highest in the land.

## CHAPTER V.

GEORGE FREDERICK COOKE.

His First *Penchant* for the Stage—Early Strolling—Preaching and Practice—A Pleasant Tête-à-Tête—Dissipation and Misery—His First Appearance in London—His Richard and Shylock—Compared with Kemble—His Sir Pertinax Macsycophant—Neglect of Study—His “Old Complaint”—An Expensive Display of Loyalty—Declining Popularity—The First Great English Actor who visited America—In the States—Gasconading—A Bloodless Duel—Failing Health—Death—Post Mortem—Two Grim Stories.

COOKE'S parentage and place of birth are both doubtful; he has been claimed as an Irishman and a Scotchman, but, according to his own statement on his death-bed, he was born in Westminster in 1756, and soon afterwards removed to Berwick, where he was brought up. He was in the habit of boasting that his father was an army captain, but it is more probable that he was a sergeant. At all events, his mother was left a widow, in very straitened circumstances, while he was quite a child. The Edinburgh theatrical company coming to Berwick for a short season seems to have

decided George Frederick's destiny. He was taken to see "The Provoked Husband," and from that time he says, in a "Chronicle" which was found after his death among his papers, plays and playing were never absent from his thoughts. He was then under the protection of two aunts, who had apprenticed him to a printer. Cooke's account of his early years, however, is not sufficiently trustworthy to be quoted. It would appear that he did not long remain in the printer's office, that he went to sea, and afterwards spent some time in London, where he saw Macklin and Garrick in several of their finest parts. At twenty we find him making his first bow in a strolling company, acting in the large room of a public-house at Brentford, as Dumont, in Rowe's "Jane Shore." For two years he strolled about the towns of the south coast, Hastings, Rye and others: and in 1778 appeared for a benefit at the Haymarket as Castalio in Otway's "Orphan." The next year he played several other parts in the same theatre, but without attracting any attention. Then back to the provinces, sometimes in barns, sometimes in respectable theatres, like those of Liverpool and Manchester.

At length, in 1794, he was engaged for Dublin, and after eighteen years of probation appeared for the first time before an audience worthy of those great talents which were already fully developed. But alas, so convivial a city as the Irish

capital was a bad home for one of Cooke's habits ; and although his success as an actor was great, his dissipation, which there became worse than ever, ruined his prospects.

Dunlap, in his life of Cooke, published in 1813, and Mathews, in his "Memoirs," relates an anecdote which gives a good idea of his outrageous conduct at this period. Mathews, then a very young man, was a member of the same company, and lived in the same house with him. One night, having played Mordecai to Cooke's Sir Archy Macsarcasm, in Macklin's "Love à la Mode," much to the tragedian's satisfaction, he was invited to sup and share a jug of whisky punch in his room. The young novice delightedly accepted the invitation, thinking himself much honoured, and failed not to pour forth those laudations upon his host's talents which were so grateful to George Frederick's ears. One jug of punch was quickly emptied and a second filled, and Cooke began to praise his guest in a patronizing way. "You are young," he said, "and want some one to advise and guide you. Take my word for it, there is nothing like industry and sobriety. In our profession dissipation is the bane of youth, villainous company, low company, leads them from study," &c. Holding forth thus, the jugs of punch continued to disappear with ever increasing rapidity. Mathews rose to leave, but was pushed back into his seat again. "You shan't stir; we'll have one

more cruikseen lawn, my dear fellow, and then you shall go to bed," said the tragedian, now growing very drunk. "You don't know me. The world don't know me. Many an hour that they suppose I've wasted in drinking, I have devoted to the study of my profession; the passions and all their variations; their nice and imperceptible gradations. You shall see me delineate the passions of the human mind, by facial expression." The power of the whisky, however, acting in diametric opposition to the will on his strong and flexible features, produced contortions and distortions of which he was insensible. Mathews, a little hazy himself from the potent liquor, half alarmed, and yet with difficulty repressing his laughter at these extraordinary grimaces, sat staring at him, endeavouring to understand these delineations, and wishing himself out of the room. After each horrible face, Cooke demanded, with an air of intense self-approval, "Well, sir, and what is that?" "It's very fine, sir," answered Mathews, without the remotest conception what he should say. "Yes, but what is it?" "Well—a—oh, yes—anger?" "You're a blockhead," roared the tragedian, "the whisky has muddled your brains. It's fear—fear, sir." Then followed more horrible contortions and more questions, but Mathews never guessed right. "Now, sir," said the angry delineator at last, "I will show you something you cannot possibly mistake." And he made

a hideous face compounded of satanic malignancy, and the leering of a drunken satyr. "What's that, sir." "That? oh, revenge!" "Dolt, idiot! despite o'erwhelm thee," burst forth Cooke, furiously: "It is love!" This was too much, and forgetful of consequences, Mathews fell back in his chair and roared with laughter. "What, sir! Do you laugh? Am I not George Frederick Cooke? born to command a thousand slaves like thee!" Mathews immediately apologised, averring that the punch had stupefied him. This mollified his host's indignation, and finding the jug empty he called out for his landlady to refill it. But he had faithfully promised the previous one should be the last, and Mrs. Burns intended to keep him to his word. "Sure, Mr. Cooke," she answered from below, "I am gone to bed, and you can't have any more to-night." "Indeed, but I will," he replied. Mathews tried to get away, but was again thrust into his chair, while Cooke reiterated his demand for more punch. But Mrs. Burns remained obdurate. Cooke took up the jug and smashed it on the floor over her head. "Do you hear that, Mrs. Burns?" "Yes, I do, Mr. Cooke." Then smash went the chairs, the fire-irons, the table, and between each the question, "Do you hear that, Mrs. Burns?" "Indeed, but I do, and you'll be sorry for it to-morrow." Up went the window, and out, one after another, went the fragments of the broken furniture

into the street. Mathews, believing he was in company with a madman, and now thoroughly frightened, endeavoured to make a bolt, but was seized and dragged back. Finding him struggle violently, Cooke rushed to the window and shouted, "Watch, watch!" A watchman attracted by the uproar was already beneath. "I give this man in charge," roared Cooke, "he has committed murder." "What do you mean?" cried the alarmed youth. "Yes, to my certain knowledge he has this night committed an atrocious, cold-blooded murder. He has most barbarously murdered an inoffensive Jew gentleman named Mordecai; I charge him with it in the name of Macklin, the author of 'Love à la Mode.' Here Mathews, by a desperate effort, wrenched himself away and fled, Cooke hurling after him the candle and candlestick.

The disgrace and notoriety of this transaction drove him on to further mad intemperance; the stage was abandoned, and, in a fit of drunkenness and despair, he enlisted as a private in a regiment destined for the West Indies. Fortunately for him, however, sickness prevented him embarking. Yet he remained in the army until 1796. In that year, Maxwell, the manager of the Portsmouth Theatre, being in Southampton, was accosted by a soldier, in whom he recognised Cooke. He asked him for assistance to purchase his discharge; with the aid of the manager of the Manchester Theatre, this was

accomplished. Maxwell heard no more of the truant for some weeks. One day a boy came to the Portsmouth Theatre, and accosted him with, "A poor sick man who has been a soldier, sir, is now at my mother's, and wishes to see you before he dies." He went to a low public-house, and there found Cooke in a state of the most abject misery. His Manchester friends had procured his discharge, and sent him money to pay his journey to that city; the money was spent in drink, he was taken ill, crawled from Southampton to Portsmouth, and sank exhausted at this public-house. Again the managers came to the rescue, sent him money and clothes, and had him conveyed to London, where a friend of theirs received him, and undertook his escort into the north. But, stopping upon the road just before he arrived in Manchester, he got so intoxicated that he could not appear before the crowded house that had assembled to greet his return.

In 1797 he reappeared at Dublin, and spoke the address on the occasion of the opening of the new Theatre Royal, in Crow Street. During the engagement, he played for the first time with John Kemble, who came to star. One night while he was waiting at the side scene for his cue to go on, Kemble came up and said: "Mr. Cooke, you distressed me exceedingly in my last scene, I could scarcely get on. You did not give me more than one cue; you were very imperfect." "Sir, I was

perfect," replied Cooke. "Excuse me, sir, you were not." "I was, sir." "You were not." "I'll tell you what; I'll not have your faults fathered upon me. And d—— me, Black Jack (Kemble's nickname), if I don't make you tremble in your pumps one of these days yet."

In the year 1800, Cooke, then in the forty-fifth year of his age, was engaged for Covent Garden, for three years, at six, seven, and eight pounds a week; there he appeared on the 31st of October, as Richard the Third. "Never," he says, "was a reception more flattering, nor did ever I receive more encouraging, indulgent, and warm approbation than on that night, both through the play and at the conclusion. Mr. Kemble did me the honour of making one of the audience."

"His superiority over all other" (Richards), says his biographer, Mr. Dunlap, "in the dissimulation, the crafty hypocrisy, and the bitter sarcasm of the character, is acknowledged by every writer who has criticised his acting. . . . His triumph in this character was so complete, that after a struggle Kemble resigned it altogether to him."

During the season he played the part twenty-three times. A German writer, quoted by Dunlap, gives the following contrasted picture of Cooke:—"Cooke does not possess the elegant figure of Kemble; but his countenance beams with great expression. The most prominent features in the physiognomy of

Cooke, are a long and somewhat hooked nose, of uncommon breadth between the eyes, which are fiery, dark, and at times terribly expressive, with prominent lids and flexible brows ; a lofty and broad forehead, and the muscles around the mouth pointedly marked. His countenance is certainly not so dignified as Kemble's, but its expression of passion, particularly the worst passions of our nature, is stronger. His voice, though sharp, is powerful, and of great compass, a pre-eminence which he possesses by nature over Kemble, and of which he skilfully avails himself. His attitudes are far less picturesque than those of Kemble, but they are just, appropriate and natural."

His second character was Shylock, in which he was equally successful. Strange, that a few years afterwards, Kean, who so strongly resembled him, should have won his first two triumphs in the same parts, with only the order reversed. Cooke's third character was Sir Archy Macsarcasm, his fourth Iago, which added another to his list of successes. Macbeth followed, but here he was much inferior to Kemble ; yet he played it four nights to crowded houses. Kitely, in which he had seen Garrick, and remembered him, was his next part, and was deemed the most perfect of all he had yet performed. Sir Giles Overreach was another triumph ; but in the Stranger, which he performed for his benefit, he could not approach Kemble's pre-

eminence. The managers of Covent Garden gave him this benefit free of all expenses, and the receipts were £560.

During this period he seems by an effort of will to have reformed, or at least to have modified his former vicious habits. But at the close of the London season he went "starring" in the provinces, and, returning to his old haunts and his old bad companions, fell back into dissipation and degradation. When on the opening night of his second season he was advertised to appear as Richard, he was playing at Newcastle, with "a small, undisciplined set," to use his own words. The house was crowded, and the audience made a great disturbance when Lewis, the acting manager, was compelled to announce to them that Cooke had not arrived. Considerable excitement had been aroused on the occasion by the fact that Kemble, entering the lists with his rival, had announced the same play at Drury Lane. And not until five weeks afterwards did George Frederick make his appearance. How that interim was passed may be surmised. But after some clamour upon his first entrance, and an apologetic speech on his part, in which there was not one word of truth, the audience forgave him and applauded his acting as enthusiastically as ever. Although his conduct had already diminished his attractiveness, Harris, the manager, after giving him a

second free benefit, the receipts of which, however, fell to £409, re-engaged him for another three years at £14 a week; a miserable salary after all, for a man of his abilities. His waning popularity rose again with his representation of Sir Pertinax Macsycophant, in Macklin's "Man of the World," which Mrs. Inchbald considered equal to the original.

I subjoin some extracts from one of Leigh Hunt's criticisms upon his acting in this part:

"You may see all the faults and all the beauties of Cooke in this single character. . . . If Cooke bows it is with a face that says, 'What a fool you are to be deceived with this fawning!' If he looks friendly it is with a smile that says, 'I will make use of you, and you may go to the devil.' A simple rustic might feel all his affections warmed at his countenance, and exclaim, 'What a pure-hearted old gentleman!' but a fine observer would descry under the glowing exterior, nothing but professions without meaning, and a heart without warmth. The sarcasm of Cooke is at all times most bitter, but in this character its acerbity is tempered with no respect either for its object or for himself. His tone is outrageously smooth and deep; and when it finds its softest level, its under monotony is so full of what is called hugging one's self, and is accompanied with such a dragged smile and viciousness of leer, that he seems as if he had lost his

voice through the mere enjoyment of malice. It is in thus acting that in characters of the most apparent labour, as well as in a total neglect of study, this excellent actor surpasses all his contemporaries. His principal faults are confined to his person, for they consist in a monotonous gesture, and a very awkward gait. His shrinking rise of the shoulders, however, may give an idea of that contracted watchfulness with which a mean hypocrite retires into himself. His general air, indeed, his sarcastic cast of countenance, with its close wideness of smile and its hooked nose, and his utter want of study, joined to the villainous characters he represents are occasionally sufficient to make some people almost fall out with the actor."

To this criticism Dunlap subjoins the following observations, which add some additional touches to this fine picture of Cooke's style of acting:—"The neglect of study in Mr. Cooke, at least, such study as is necessary to create excellence in other men, is a curious fact in his history; and one of the most extraordinary traits in the character of this extraordinary man, is that ability which he possessed of seizing the perfect image of the person he would represent, and identifying it with his own feelings, so as to express every emotion designed by the author, as if that emotion was his own. And all this as if by intuition, for nobody knew of his studying, except in that hasty and desultory man-

ner which his journal at times indicates. But his perception was uncommonly quick, and his earlier observations on men and their passions, must have been uncommonly accurate. . . . . Cooke, when he improved his own playing by what he had seen excellent in other players, did not imitate those players, but only seized what he saw natural in them, and made it his own in his own manner." It was in this neglect of study, after he rose to eminence, for which no genius could compensate, that Cooke was so far inferior to his great successor, Kean, and rendered his failure in all the subtler parts of tragedy, such as Hamlet, so apparent.

The restraint he had put upon his inclinations during the first two years of his London engagement soon gave way: one night, in his third season, he came upon the stage in an evident state of intoxication, pleaded indisposition as an apology, tried to play, was hissed, and, unable to proceed, was obliged to retire. After this, we find "too indisposed to act" often entered in his diary of provincial tours. How little, spite of his talents, he was estimated in private life, is evident from the fact that we find no mention in that record of any person of standing seeking his society, or inviting him to their house; an omission so complete it would be impossible to find in the career of any other distinguished actor, the society of such being always eagerly sought after. Each succeeding season

his absence was of more frequent occurrence; but at his next appearance he was always ready with a plausible address to the outraged public—he had been confined to his bed “by a violent disorder—” whatever acts of imprudence he “may have” committed, in *this* instance his conduct was unimpeachable; and a good-natured audience was ever ready to condone his past offences and applaud his new efforts to amuse them. Yet, for all this, such conduct told heavily upon his attractiveness, since the announcement was never any guarantee of his appearance. One night he came on the stage as Sir Archy Macsarcasm, with Johnstone, who was playing Sir Callaghan. There was a dead pause. Then Johnstone advancing to the footlights said, with a strong brogue, “Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Cooke *says* he can’t spake.” After a shout of laughter at this real Irish bull, the curtain fell amidst a shower of hisses. At another time, after making a few ineffectual attempts to speak the dialogue, Cooke came forward, pressed his hand upon his chest, and, with a most pitiable face, stammered out, “Ladies and gentlemen—my old complaint—my old complaint.” The humour of this naïve confession, although not intended as such, was irresistible, but the roar of laughter was quickly succeeded by loud sounds of indignation. In the season of 1803-4 it was arranged that Cooke and Kemble should play the first and second parts in the great tragedies

alternately. John Philip soon grew tired of the bargain, but Cooke had to keep to it. During this time, however, Kemble played Richmond to Cooke's Richard, Old Norval to his Glenalvon, Jaffier to his Pierre, Antonio to his Shylock, Othello to his Iago, while Mrs. Siddons sustained the heroines of these plays. Irving describes Cooke's acting with Kemble in the jealous scene of "Othello." He "grasped Kemble's left hand with his own, and then fixed his right, like a claw on his shoulder. In this position, drawing himself up to him with his short arm, he breathed his poisonous whispers. Kemble coiled and twisted his hand, writhing to get away, his right hand clasping his brows, and darting his eye back on Iago. It was wonderful."

In the season of 1807-8, he did not appear until March. He had been passing the interim in Appleby gaol, where his creditors had placed him. For notwithstanding the large sums he had made by his London benefits and provincial engagements, he was overwhelmed with debt. His extravagance and reckless waste were terrible. One night he went into a low public-house in Manchester with the proceeds of his engagement in that town, amounting to nearly four-hundred pounds, in his pocket. Some fellows began abusing the King and the Constitution. Cooke, who was a strong loyalist, entered into a dispute, and challenged one of the men to determine the controversy by an

appeal to fists. The fellow replied that he took the liberty of abusing him because he was rich, and knew him to be a poor man. "Do I?" cried Cooke, "I'll show you that. There—look!" and he pulled a roll of banknotes out of his pocket and thrust them into the fire. "There, that's all I have in the world; now I am as poor as you, and now come on!"

His opening part, upon his return from *durance vile*, was Sir Pertinax, and the "Mirror," noticing the performance says: "the audience, appeared the more 'to love him for the dangers he had passed,' and with not three but six rounds of applause greeted his return. Such a house had not been seen since 'the little hour of little Betty.'"

From an entry in his diary, under the date 30th of January, 1809, it would appear his salary had been raised to £20 a week. But he was sinking more rapidly than ever in public estimation. The journals depreciated his acting, comparing it unfavourably with that of far inferior players, and made him a butt to shoot their frequently dull and coarse witticisms upon. His last season in London (1809-10) culminated his degradation. More than once he came upon the stage only to be led off incapable of speech. The management could not depend on him from one hour to the other. Even when he was comparatively sober a sudden caprice would determine him not to play, and from

some place where he was not likely to be found, he would send word he should not act that evening. At another time, after he had been given up and another performer, sometimes Kemble himself, was about to step on the stage for the part, he would appear suddenly at the wing dressed for the character. After each of his escapades there was a humble apology to be made to the audience, until indignation gave way to contempt. The 5th of June, 1810, when he played Falstaff, in the first part of Henry IV., was the date of his last appearance upon the London stage.

Thence he went to Liverpool, always one of his strongholds. One night, however, being attacked with his "old complaint," the audience angrily demanded an apology. "Apology from me! from George Frederick Cooke!" he cried. "Take it from this remark: there's not a brick in your infernal town which is not cemented by the blood of a slave." Cooper, the American actor, was in the town at the time, and offered him an engagement for America at £25 a week. He was still bound, however, to Harris, the Covent Garden manager. But Cooper, who knew he would be a splendid speculation in New York, was determined to have him, and after much manœuvring contrived to carry him off out of some vile Liverpool slum, while in a state of intoxication, and get him on

board a ship bound for America, where he landed in November, 1810.

He was the first great English actor who crossed the Atlantic, and Dunlap, himself an American, says: "It appeared as impossible that the great London actor should be removed to America, as that St. Paul's Cathedral should have been transported across the ocean. Englishmen in New York swore roundly it could not be. It was some other performer of the same name—it was even insinuated that the whole thing was an imposition." Mr. Dunlap, describing his first introduction to him, continues: "The neatness of his dress, his sober suit of grey, his powdered grey hairs, and suavity of address, gave no indication of the eccentric being whose weaknesses had been the theme of the English fugitive publications; nor could the strictest examination detect any of those marks by which the votaries of intemperance, falsely called pleasure, are so universally stigmatized." He goes on to relate that Price, the American manager, on opening the door of the room where he was informed that Cooke awaited him, and seeing a man so different to what he had pictured retired again, and told the servants he had been directed to the wrong apartment.

He appeared on the 21st of November as Richard. The excitement was enormous, the crush was unprecedented, hundreds were unable to gain

admission, such a house had never before been seen in America. His reception was splendid. "His appearance," continues Dunlap, "was picturesque and proudly noble; his head elevated, his step firm, his eye beaming fire. I saw no vestige of the venerable, grey-haired old gentleman I had been introduced to at the coffee-house; and the utmost effort of my imagination could not have reconciled the figure I now saw, with that of imbecility and intemperance."

He was sober, played with all his old greatness, and his success was complete. His other celebrated parts followed, and the houses, spite of snowstorms, which would on any other occasion, says his biographer, have rendered the theatre "a heartless void;" were nightly crammed. In seventeen nights, there were taken 21,578 dollars. But alas, he quickly fell into his old vices. The night of his benefit he appeared as Cato, without having once refreshed his memory by reading the part, and intoxicated as well; he uttered a string of incoherences, but scarcely one word of Addison's. This escapade was followed by others, and the old life of riot and excess recommenced; the old story of disappointed audiences, of disappearances for days together, until he was found penniless in some squalid den in the vilest purlieus of the city.

The second city of the States he visited was Boston, where he was also enthusiastically received.

Thence he returned to New York, but his evil habits, his wild extravagancies, and, above all, his insolence to the people, had even during his brief first visit destroyed his popularity. He had a hatred for republican institutions, and never lost an opportunity of displaying it. A gentleman mentioning that his family were amongst the first settlers in Maryland, Cooke demanded if he had kept the family jewels: "I mean *the chains and handcuffs*," he added. Hearing the President was coming to see him act, he exclaimed, "What! I, George Frederick Cooke, who have played before the majesty of Britain, play before your Yankee president! I'll not play before him. It is degradation enough to play before rebels, but I'll not go on for the amusement of a king of rebels, the contemptible king of the Yankee-doodles." He asserted that when a youth he had been in the army during the American rebellion. Upon the heights of Brooklyn being pointed out to him, he exclaimed: "That's the spot we marched up; the rebels retreated, we charged; they fled; we mounted the hill. I carried the colours of the 5th; my father carried them before me; my son now carries them. I led—Washington was in the rear of the rebels. I pressed forward, when at this moment Howe cried 'Halt!' But for that, sir, I should have carried Washington, and there would have been an end of the rebellion."

One night he was lamenting over his cups that he had no children, but shortly afterwards filled up a bumper and proposed the health of his eldest son, a captain in the 5th. "What is his name?" inquired one of his companions. "What is my name, sir? George Frederick Cooke." A little time afterwards he proposed the health of his second son. "And what is his name?" was again the query. "What should it be, sir, but George Frederick Cooke?" That same night, being very intoxicated, he was put into his coach by his host, who bore him company; and all the way along he abused the country. The coachman driving a little recklessly, the gentleman put his head out of window and cautioned him. "What, sir," cried Cooke, "do you pretend to direct my servant? Get out of my coach. Stop, coachman." "Drive on," commanded his companion. "Do you dare order my coachman? Get out, or this fist shall—" "Sit still, sir, or I'll blow your brains out!" was the quiet reply. For a moment Cooke sat still, petrified with astonishment; then began: "Has George Frederick Cooke come to this infernal country to be treated thus? Shall it be told in England? Well, sir, if you will not get out, I will." And out he got and sat down on the roadside. He threatened that on his return to England he would publish such a satirical picture of the country and

its inhabitants as had never been seen of any other part of the world.

“The Yankee-doodles” were certainly a milder race then than they were in the days of Kean and Macready, or George Frederick’s career would have been speedily cut short by bullet or bowie-knife. But, as the last anecdote indicates, rash valour was not among his failings. Indeed, he was always ready to retreat before the consequences of his insolence. One day, in company with some others, he had a hot dispute with a bullying fellow, and assailed him with the most abusive language. The fellow showed fight; Cooke cooled down. Then one of his companions took up the quarrel, and ejected his opponent. There was a row and a scuffle on the stairs. Cooke retired to his bedroom and called his servant. “Sam, it’s very late; help me off with my clothes; I’ll go to bed.” Just then one of the party from below came running up, and finding the tragedian already half undressed, exclaimed, “Why, Mr. Cooke! why are you here, while Price is fighting that rascal for you?” “Where is the scoundrel?” cried Cooke, fiercely. “Sam, why are you so slow? Give me my boots. Where is the scoundrel? My coat, Sam. Where is the blackguard?” But the scrimmage was over long before Cooke was ready to take part in it. Some of his American friends generously entered into the humour of his Pistol-like bravery, and

challenged him. "You must apologise or fight," said one of these, after the actor had been as usual railing against the country. "I will not apologise, young gentleman," he answered loftily; "I will fight you. But if I fight you I shall shoot you. I am the best shot in Europe. If *you insist* upon it I will shoot you. I would not willingly shed blood." But it may be doubted whether Cooke did not see through the quiz, for the whole routine of the duel was carried through; the pistols loaded only with powder, were discharged; his antagonist, pretending to be shot, fell, and the actor, cutting the sleeve of his coat, made believe he was wounded in the shoulder.

At Philadelphia his success almost equalled that of New York. In sixteen nights the receipts were 17,360 dollars. Upon his return to Boston, such was the rage for seeing Cooke, that though it was the depth of winter, and excessively cold, the box office was surrounded from three o'clock in the morning until the time of opening, which was ten.

From the time of his landing in America his health began to fail, and on several occasions he was incapacitated from appearing through real indisposition. A constitution of iron alone could have withstood such years of debauchery, but it gave way at last. On the 31st of July, 1812, while playing Sir Giles Overreach at Boston, he was taken for death, but lingered till the following September,

when he died. He was preparing at the time to return to England, Harris having written to him to come back to Covent Garden. "John Bull," says the letter, "is as fond of you as ever, and would be most happy to see his favourite again." We could have no better proof of Cooke's great abilities than such an offer after all his disgraceful behaviour.

But not even after the grave had closed over him, had George Frederick, at least in body, ended his eccentric career. I will conclude this chapter with two extraordinary anecdotes of the *post mortem* period; the first is given on the authority of Dr. Doran, the second on that of Mr. Procter (Barry Cornwall) in his "Life of Edmund Kean."

After his decease the doctors not only opened his body to discover the cause of death, but one, Dr. Francis, took possession of his head for phrenological purposes, and kept the skull in his surgery. One night "Hamlet" was to be performed at the Park; at the last moment the property man found he had no skull, and hastened to the doctor's to borrow one. The one lent was Cooke's. It was returned that night, but next evening at a meeting of the Cooper Club, the circumstance being known to several there, a desire was expressed to examine the head of the great tragedian, which was again produced, for the investigation of Daniel Webster, Henry Wheaton, and other celebrities. Anecdote number one. Now for number two.

Kean was an enthusiastic admirer of Cooke, and when he was in New York visited his grave. Finding it without a memorial stone, he had the body taken up, removed to another place, and a handsome monument placed over it. In the transition from one grave to another he contrived to abstract one of the toe-bones,\* and this he brought back to London with him as a precious relic. Upon his arrival in England, Elliston and several of the Drury Lane Company went as far as Barnet to meet him. When he arrived at the hotel where they were to breakfast, he stopped all their greetings with, "Before you say a word, Behold! Fall down and kiss this relic! This is the toe-bone of the greatest creature that ever walked the earth—of George Frederick Cooke. Come, down with you all and kiss the bone!" Elliston, to humour him, dropped upon his knees, and kissed the relic, and the others followed his example. Arriving home, Kean's first words to his wife were, "I have brought Charles a fortune. I have something that the directors of the British Museum would give ten thousand pounds for; but they shan't have it. Here it is, the toe-bone of the greatest man that ever lived—George Frederick Cooke. Now, observe; I put this on the mantel-piece; but let no one dare to touch it. You may all look at it—at a distance, but be sure no one presumes to handle it."

\* A more recent authority says it was a finger-bone.

There it lay for months an object of pride to the possessor, who never failed to point it out to his visitors. But Mrs. Kean, far from sharing her husband's satisfaction, held the relic in disgust. One day, resolved no longer to endure its sight, she caught hold of it with a piece of paper and threw it over the wall into the next garden. That night Kean returned, as was his wont, very inebriated. He missed the bone. He stormed, raved, summoned the servants out of their beds, and searched every likely and unlikely spot. At last the conviction was forced upon him that it was gone. Sinking into a chair he exclaimed, with drunken lachrymoseness, "Mary, your son has lost a fortune. He was worth £10,000; now he is a beggar?"

It may be remarked that if Kean contrived to extract a toe-bone, how was it that he did not discover the corpse to be headless? Mr. Procter, however, vouches for the truth of the story, but considers it to be doubtful whether the body exhumed was really that of Cooke.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SOME FAMOUS COMEDIANS.

Jack Bannister—His Acting in "The Children in the Wood"  
—Provincial Criticism—Dr. Syntax—"Bannister's Budget"—  
Lewis—The Original of Jeremy Diddler—Edwin—His "Gags"  
—"Peeping Tom"—Dicky Suett—His Death.

THERE is scarcely any other of our old actors who is mentioned so lovingly as "Jack" BANNISTER; "Delightful Bannister!" Leigh Hunt calls him. "Jack Bannister and he (Suett)," writes Elia, "had the fortune to be more of personal favourites with the town than any actors before or after. . . Jack was more *beloved* for his sweet, good-natured moral pretensions. Dicky was more *liked* for his sweet, good-natured no pretensions at all. Your whole conscience stirred with Bannister's performance of Walter, in "The Children in the Wood." This was his great part, peculiarly adapted as it was to display that combination of tragedy and comedy, which was his chief excellence.

Walpole says it was one of the most admirable performances he ever saw, that his transports of joy and despair were incomparable, and his various countenances would be adapted to the pencil of Salvator Rosa. "He made me shed as many tears as I suppose the old original ballad did when I was six years old." Yet actors of the present day would find nothing in such a character beyond that of an ordinary melodrama; their predecessors were creators, who could clothe a meagre skeleton with flesh and render it a thing of delight and beauty, whereas *they* have enough to do to deliver the mere words of the author with point and effect.

During his lesseeship at Manchester, Elliston played a trick that justly reprov'd provincial self-conceit. Bannister being in the city, he conceived the joke of putting him in the bills for a small part in a comedy, under an assumed name, and announcing that between the play and the farce the gentleman would attempt a scene from "The Children in the Wood," after the manner of the celebrated Mr. John Bannister. On this evening he acted it in his best manner. But scarcely had he uttered three words when the audience began to hiss, and very soon there rose cries of "Off, off," and the hissing and clamour rose to such a height, that he was obliged to retire. On the Saturday, one of the newspapers declared it was the vilest attempt at imitation that had ever been offered to

the public! Bannister was the most admirable sailor ever seen; not the transpontine trouser-hitching, tobacco-chewing monster, who talks as no human being ever talked, but the real "salt."

"Mr. Bannister," says Leigh Hunt, "is the first low comedian on the stage. Let an author present him with a humorous idea, whether it be of jollity of ludicrous distress, or of grave indifference, whether it be mock heroic, burlesque, or mimicry, and he embodies it with an instantaneous felicity."

His father, Charles Bannister, was a good actor and singer under Foote's management. John was born in 1760. He was intended for an artist, and was a student at the Royal Academy; but he preferred the stage, and appeared at the Haymarket as Dick, in "The Apprentice," for his father's benefit in 1778.

Tragedy, however, was his ambition, and Garrick trained him with great care in the part of Zaphna, in "Mahomet." But Jack soon discovered that comedy was his destiny. To his other talents was added an admirable one for mimicry. In 1807, he went through the country with a Mathews' kind of entertainment called "Bannister's Budget," consisting of imitations and characters. He always kept up his associations with artists and was himself clever as a caricaturist; he is said to have first suggested to Rowlandson his idea of Dr. Syntax.

He had a flexibility of feature, an eye and a power of facial expression only surpassed by Garrick. He was as delightful off the stage as on, and had such wit, geniality, and good-nature that it would have been impossible for an anchorite to have been dull in his presence. He quitted the stage in 1815, but lived in the enjoyment of his ample means until 1835. He lies buried with his father in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.

LEWIS, the airiest and most mercurial of comedians, the most restless of human beings, "the sprightly, the gay, the exhilarating, the genteel," was Harry Woodward's successor. During his youth he played both in tragedy and comedy, but afterwards entirely confined himself to the latter. His great charm was his animal spirits; he was the original personator of nearly all Reynolds' and O'Keefe's rattling, hare-brained, and impossibly-lively heroes, and of Kenney's still famous Jeremy Diddler. Like Paul Pry, that most amusing of impudent adventurers was drawn from life. The original was a gentleman who had obtained the cognomen of "Half-crown Bibb." He never met an acquaintance without asking a loan, in the very words of his great stage-double: "Have you got such a thing as ninepence about you?" Meeting Morton, the dramatic author, in the street one day, he requested the loan of five shillings. "I have only three and sixpence in change," replied the victim, handing it to him.

“By-the-by,” said Bibb, at parting, “don’t forget you owe me eighteenpence; you know, I intended to borrow a crown of you.” His father made him a weekly allowance of a pound, but he borrowed of every relation, as well as of every acquaintance, and if they refused him, he would sit down upon their door-steps with such an air of intense dejection that he was sure to gather a crowd round him, until the persecuted householder was obliged to send out the solicited coins to rid himself of the nuisance. Strange to relate, “Half-crown Bibb” died on the same night the farce was brought out. Lewis made his first appearance as an actor at Dublin in 1770, and in 1773 came to Covent Garden, of which house he was acting-manager during twenty-one years. He was a man of property; and purchased a sixth share of the Covent Garden patent, which, as we have seen, he afterwards disposed of to Kemble. He retired in 1809, and died in 1813.

EDWIN may be regarded as Weston’s successor in that peculiar style of comedy, or rather farce-acting, which passed from him to Liston, and ended with Wright. His first appearance was at Dublin in 1765; thence he passed over to Bath in 1768. In 1776 he was engaged for the Haymarket, where for three years he played during the summer months, and returned to the Western city for the winter. He opened at Covent Garden in 1779, after which,

he alternated between that house and the Haymarket.

Many performers before and since the days of Edwin have acquired the power, by private winks, irrelevant buffonery, and dialogue, to make their fellow-players laugh, and thus confound the audience and mar the scene. Edwin disdaining this confined and distracting system, established a sort of *entre-nous-ship* with the public, and made them his confidants; and, though wrong in his principle, yet so neatly and skilfully did he execute it, that instead of injuring the business of the stage, he frequently enriched it. He was the original Lingo, and of nearly all O'Keefe's farce parts. Never was author and actor so indebted to one another. His humour was wholly spontaneous; he could not transform himself into a character; he was always irresistably comic, but he was always Edwin. He was a terrible "gagger," and took such liberties with the audience as would not be countenanced in any save the lowest theatres now-a-days.

Frederick Reynolds relates how he was in the boxes one night witnessing his performance in "The Son-in-Law." In one of the scenes he has to propose to an old gentleman for his daughter's hand. "But you are so ugly," objects the father. Upon which Edwin advanced to the footlights, and, appealing to the audience said: "I submit to the decision of an enlightened British public which is

the ugliest of us three—I, Cranky (the old man), or that gentleman in the front row of the balcony-box?" (pointing to Reynolds). Boaden gives a fine description of his acting in one of his famous parts.

"Peeping Tom had one scene more masterly than anything I have seen in farce: I mean that of poor Tom's abstraction while, in his mind's eye, he sees the whole procession of Lady Godiva pass before him. This was a thing of pure fancy, and infinitely productive. You would have sworn to the succeeding images of the procession—the distant view of the equitation of Lady Godiva—her approach—her 'unadorned charms' at last brought fully before his eyes, the burst of commentary, 'Talk of a coronation!' all together produced a revelry of enjoyment that used to convulse the spectators, and it is a precious recollection of the power of a true comedian." Sir Hugh Evans was another masterpiece of acting. "This singular being," says Boaden, "was the absolute victim of sottish intemperance. I have seen him brought to the stage-door at the bottom of a chaise senseless and motionless; if the clothes could be put upon him, and he was pushed on to the lamps, he rubbed his stupid eyes for a minute, consciousness and brilliant humour awakened together, and his acting seemed only the richer for the beastial indulgence that had overwhelmed him." On the day of his funeral the lid of the coffin was raised and on the dead actor's

face was seen the same peculiar serio-comic smile that was always wont "to set the table in a roar."

SUETT, when a boy, was a chorister at St. Paul's. He made his first appearance at Drury Lane in 1780, and was considered to be Parsons' successor; but he was not so legitimate an actor as his predecessor, being much given to gag and grimace. Yet he was exquisitely droll. "He was the Robin Goodfellow of the stage," writes Elia, "he came in to trouble all things with a welcome perplexity; himself no whit troubled in the matter. He was known, like Puck, by his note—ha! ha! ha!—sometimes deepening to ho! ho! ho! . . . . Thousands of hearts yet respond to the chuckling 'O la' of Dicky Suett, brought back to their remembrance by the faithful transcript of his friend Mathews' mimicry. The force of nature could no further go. He drolled upon the stock of these two syllables richer than the cuckoo.

. . . Shakespeare foresaw him when he framed his fools and jesters. They have all the true Suett stamp, a loose and shambling gait, a slippery tongue." Yet this creature, so merry upon the stage, was a martyr to a horrible nervousness. Once when he and Boaden were talking together, he gave the latter "a most curious and unaffected detail of the horrors that pursued him nightly whenever sleep surprised him. I solemnly declare that no powers, of even German invention, have yet given a series

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of images so terrific, nor displayed so graphically, as was the record of misery endured by Suetts." Alas, the bottle, the curse of so many of our old actors, was at the root of it all. To again quote the inimitable Elia, "When death came himself, not in metaphor, to fetch Dicky, it is recorded of him by Robert Palmer, who kindly watched his exit, that he received the last stroke, neither varying his accustomed tranquillity nor tune, with the simple exclamation worthy to have been recorded in his epitaph 'O la ! O la ! Bobby'" He died in 1805, and was buried in the churchyard of St. Paul's Cathedral.

## CHAPTER VII.

ONE OF TWO ROMANCES.—“ PERDITA ” ROBINSON.

Mary Darby's Early History—Her Inclination for the Stage—An Unwilling Bride—Mr. Robinson's Family—Great Expectations—The Belle of the Day—Temptation—A House of Cards—Poverty and a Prison—An Actress at Last—A Brilliant Success—An Eventful Night—Florizel to Perdita—A Romantic Meeting—Farewell to the Stage—A Prince's Love—Forsaken—A Bitter End.

“ **F**RAILTY, thy name is woman !” would be an appropriate motto for these romances. But how many of you straight-laced ladies whoso savagely condemn the actress, without recommendation to mercy, would pass scatheless through the ordeal to which she is subjected, the temptations by which she is surrounded ? To be homely in mind and face, without beauty or wit, to be born and reared and coddled in all the respectabilities and conventionalities, to be watched so carefully that you could never find the opportunity of going astray, even if you desired it, to never attract the attention of any

man who was not the very opposite of a Lothario—in short, who was not as dull and as ordinary as yourselves, and to develope into immaculate matrons, is not such a marvellous matter to congratulate yourselves upon. But to be born altogether out of the orthodoxies, left to your own wild will; to be poor and beautiful and brilliant, to see the noblest and handsomest men sighing at your feet, begging your acceptance of silks and satins and diamonds, doing homage to your talents as well as to your face; to be warm, impulsive, passionate by nature; and then to come out of the fire scatheless, as many an actress has done and will do—well then, ladies, you have earned the right to toss your heads and curl your lips, and look down upon one who has not been blessed with your powers of resistance.

In all stage annals, and it is saying a great deal, there is no sadder romance than the one I am about to relate. The whole story, as narrated by Mrs. Robinson herself, is so like a novel of the last century, that we can scarcely believe but that it is the adventures of some persecuted but fictitious heroine we are perusing. There is little doubt, however, but that the record is, in the main, true—that she was far more sinned against than sinning. Even so rigid a moralist as Hannah More could not condemn her. Cynical Horace Walpole, who scarcely ever uttered a word of pity for human frailty, could say, “I make the greatest allowance for inexperience

and novel passions ;” and strait-laced Sarah Siddons exclaimed, “ Poor Perdita ! I pity her from my very heart !”

MARY DARBY was born in November, 1758, in an old house adjoining the Bristol Cathedral. She describes herself as being, when a child, swarthy, with very large eyes, and melancholy features, and that the early propensities of her life were romantic and singular ; she loved to creep into the cathedral aisle, or to sit beneath the great brass-eagle reading desk, and listen to the pealing of the organ and the chanting of the choir. At a very early age she began to write poems in accordance with such habits. The school to which she was sent was kept by the Misses More, sisters of Hannah More, and there she had for schoolmates Priscilla Hopkins, afterwards Mrs. John Kemble, and a daughter of Mrs. Pritchard, the great actress. Being an only daughter, she seems to have been petted and spoiled. “ My clothes,” she says, “ were sent for from London ; my fancy was indulged to the extent of its caprices ; I was flattered and praised into a belief that I was a being of a superior order. To sing, to play a lesson on the harpischord, to recite an elegy, and to make doggerel verses, made the extent of my occupations.”

Her father was a merchant ; a speculation took him to Labrador, where he lost all his money, and formed a female connection which kept him away

from home. Mrs. Darby removed to London, and was compelled to open a small school at Chelsea to eke out a subsistence; but our ex-merchant returning unexpectedly, was so indignant, at what he styled this degradation of his name, that he compelled her to break it up, although it would seem he contributed but little to the family support.

During this time Mary had been growing a remarkably beautiful girl of fourteen or fifteen, and so precociously developed as to be taken for seventeen or eighteen. In all her parents' vicissitudes, due care seems to have been bestowed upon her education, and she was as clever and accomplished in mind as she was charming in person. By-and-by the father disappeared again; his parting words to his wife are highly characteristic—"Take care that no dishonour falls upon my daughter; if she is not safe at my return I will annihilate you!" These words greatly influenced the girl's future destiny.

Her dancing-master hearing her recite one day was so struck by the talents she displayed, that he persuaded her to take to the stage, and procured an introduction to Garrick, who was then about to retire. She passed an evening at his house, and recited to Roscius, who was so pleased, that he arranged she should appear as Cordelia to his Lear, no other part being suitable to her extreme youth. She now became a frequent visitor at Adelphi Terrace. "Garrick," she says, "was delighted with

everything I did. He would sometimes dance a minuet with me, sometimes request me to sing the favourite ballads of the day, but the circumstance which most pleased him was my tone of voice, which he frequently told me resembled that of his favourite, Cibber."

But her *début* was not to take place yet awhile. A young gentleman, who lived in the opposite house, fell in love with her, and made his passion known at the window by dumb show, until Mrs. Darby was obliged to keep the blinds down all day. Then he procured an introduction, discovered the mother's pious weaknesses, and sent her "Hervey's Meditations," and such like exhilarating books. So charmed was the lady with this good young man, that although Mary had not long entered into her sixteenth year, she gave a willing ear to his proposals for an immediate union. Not so Mary, however, who by no means reciprocated his passion.

Mr. Robinson—such was the gentleman's name—was articled to the law, and represented himself as the heir expectant of a rich uncle. From a mother's point of view it was a good match, and it would overthrow the theatrical arrangements, of which Mrs. Darby was very doubtful. The dreadful threat of her bumptious husband was likewise preying upon her mind, and she was probably anxious to shift upon another the responsibility of a precociously developed and very beautiful girl,

who attracted a great deal of attention, and was vain and sentimental into the bargain. So Mary was married—rather against her will, for the event destroyed all those delicious illusions of stage triumphs upon which she had set her heart. Her only motive in marrying Mr. Robinson was, she says, to remain near her mother, whom, to clinch the matter, he had artfully arranged should live with them. “My heart, even when I knelt at the altar, was as free from any tender impression as it had been at the moment of my birth.” During the first week after the honeymoon, she told her mother, “with a torrent of tears,” that she was the most wretched of mortals. Not a favourable augury for the future life of a bride not sixteen.

Mr. Robinson desires their union to be kept secret for family reasons; but his constant evasions exciting Mrs. Darby’s suspicions, she insists upon her daughter being introduced to his relatives, and they take a journey into Wales for this purpose. Mr. Robinson is in fact the illegitimate son of a Welsh squire, who passes for his uncle. He has a sister who, although only twenty years of age, is stiff and antiquated and receives the young wife with the utmost frigidity, and there is an old housekeeper of overbearing and vindictive spirit. Mary’s time passes heavily enough in this uninteresting circle. She is condemned either to drink ale with the “Squire” or to visit a Lady Huntingdon’s chapel.

“Miss Robinson was of this sect; and though Mr. Harris was not a disciple of the Huntingdonian school, he was a constant church visitor on every Sunday. His zeal was indefatigable, and he would frequently fine the rustics (for he was a justice of the peace, and had been sheriff of the county) when he heard them swear, though every third sentence he uttered was attended by an oath that made his hearers shudder.” Mary becomes a favourite with Mr. Harris, but is hated by the two women; her fashionable style of costume is especially distasteful to Miss Robinson, and she taunts her with the folly of appearing like a woman of fortune, protesting that a lawyer’s wife has no business to dress like a duchess, and that though she may be very accomplished, a good housewife has no occasion for harpsichords and books—they belonging only to women who brought therewithal to support them. These incidents are worth noting as marking the extraordinary change of manners during the last hundred years.

At the end of three weeks the newly married pair quit this uncongenial roof and return to London. Mr. Robinson, however, delighted with the reception Mr. Harris has given his young wife, fancies his best hopes confirmed, and launches into a high style of living, handsomely furnishes a new house in Hatton Garden, and buys a carriage and saddle horses. Now begins a life of pleasure and

excitement, and Mary, splendidly dressed, is taken to Ranelagh and the Pantheon concert, then the most fashionable assemblages in London, where her beauty attracts the attention of some fashionable *roués*—Lord Northington, Lord Lyttleton, Captain Ayscough, Fitzgerald—who contrive to be introduced to her. She describes Lord Lyttleton as “the most accomplished libertine that any age or country has produced,” but modifies the statement by adding, that his manners were overbearing, insolent, his language licentious, and his person slovenly even to a degree that was disgusting. These gentlemen become constant visitors at Robinson’s house, hoping to find in this young, vain, and inexperienced girl an easy victim. To favour their plans, they lead the husband into dissipation and infidelities with the vilest women, of which they take care to inform her. Once Mr. Fitzgerald makes an attempt to carry her off. But through all these temptations, she assures us, that she remains faithful to her unworthy spouse. In the meantime she is one of the celebrities about town. By day she is seen in the Park dressed *à la paysanne*, riding in a high phaeton with her husband and two or three noble admirers, the hat of every fashionable promenader sweeping the ground before her; at night at Ranelagh and the Pantheon, patched and powdered and furbelowed like a duchess, a sensation wherever she goes.

This splendour, however, is short lived ; ignorant whence he draws his resources, she has often questioned him upon the subject, but he has always evaded her inquiries. Before twelve months have passed the crash comes ; it has been all done on credit, on the hope of Mr. Harris's future bounty. Robinson is nothing but an adventurer, who was deeply in debt before his marriage ; the creditors press, put an execution into his house, and the fabric of cards topples to the ground, leaving the imprudent pair destitute and homeless.

To such straits were they reduced that she was obliged to go into Wales for her confinement, there she met with a harsh reception, the old man refusing to give them the slightest assistance. "What do you mean to do with your child?" he inquires. "I'll tell you, tie it to your back and work for it." Leaving this inhospitable shelter as speedily as possible, she takes refuge for a short time at her grandmother's at Monmouth, but soon returns to London, where her husband is immediately arrested for debt. Her fashionable suitors, thinking this a favourable opportunity, again commence their attacks, but in spite of his bad conduct, she, with her infant daughter, take up her abode with her husband in the prison. "During nine months and three weeks never once did I pass the threshold of our dreary habitation, though every effort was made to draw me from my scene of domestic attachment." Dur-

ing this time she published a small volume of poems, with a dedication to the Duchess of Devonshire, which procured her a personal introduction to that noble lady, who greatly sympathised with her distress, gave her some substantial marks of her sympathy, and occasionally corresponded with her. At the end of ten months Robinson, by some means, contrived to get out of jail.

Soon afterwards Brereton of Drury Lane, while dining with them, turned the conversation upon Mrs. Robinson's predilection for the stage, and earnestly recommended it as a scene of great promise for her talents. This revived the old idea, and her husband no longer objecting, but on the contrary highly approving of what might turn out a very good speculation for himself, she obtained an introduction to Sheridan. The great manager, very much struck by her beauty and fascination, as well as by her undoubted abilities, made an appointment in the green-room of Drury Lane. Garrick, Brereton, and himself were present, and she there recited the principal scenes of Juliet to Brereton's Romeo, and this character was fixed on for her appearance, on December 10th, 1776. The beautiful Mrs. Robinson was already a notoriety in all places of fashionable resort, and the announcement of her appearance upon the stage crowded the theatre with fashionable spectators.

Success was almost assured by her beauty and

notoriety, without reference to her talents, and the curtain fell amidst thunders of applause. It would be difficult to pronounce at the present day upon her merits as an actress. A newspaper of the period, noticing her performance, remarks that she would be better adapted for the deeper and more solemn walks of tragedy, than the tender and passionate Juliet, her face, her voice, her looks, fitting her for the more boisterous, violent, and terrible passions. Her second part was Amanda, of which she was the original, in Sheridan's alteration of Vanbrugh's "Relapse," which he called, "A Trip to Scarborough." The audience supposing it to be a new piece, on finding themselves deceived, violently hissed it; she was very much terrified, but the Duke of Cumberland, from a side box, bade her take courage. "It is not you," he said, "they are hissing, but the piece." She curtsied, was answered by a round of applause, and the play from that time was suffered to proceed pretty quietly to the end. She next appeared as Statira in "Alexander the Great." After which she went into the provinces, to Bristol, &c., and paid a visit to her husband's Welsh relations. "Though," she says, "*the assumed sanctity* of Miss Robinson's manners condemned a dramatic life, the labour was deemed *profitable*, and the supposed immorality was consequently *tolerated*. Several parties both at home and abroad were formed for my amusement. I was

consulted as the very oracle of fashion; I was gazed at and examined with the most inquisitive curiosity. Mrs. Robinson the promising young actress was a very different person from Mrs. Robinson who had been overwhelmed with sorrow, and came to ask an asylum."

Upon her return to London she became the rage; her house was always thronged with visitors, her morning levées crowded with fashionable people, so that she could scarcely find time for study, while, she says, her fashions in dress were followed with flattering avidity. She was *the* celebrity, and courted and flattered by all the great men, whether by birth or genius, of the day. Her husband drew her salary, squandered it in gambling and upon other women, and neglected her upon whom he was then wholly dependent. We now come to that epoch of melancholy celebrity in her life, which conferred upon her that strangely appropriate name by which she will be remembered as long as the old scandals of that age survive.

She had performed two seasons in tragedy and comedy, when (December 3rd, 1779) "The Winter's Tale" was commanded by their Majesties, and she was cast for Perdita. She had never yet appeared before royalty. "By Jove, Mrs. Robinson," said Smith, who was playing Leontes, "you will make a conquest of the Prince, for to-night you look handsomer than ever." The events of that night and

those which arose from it, destined to cast so lasting and melancholy an interest over the name of "Perdita Robinson," I shall give, with a few abbreviations, in her own words :—" I hurried through the first scene, not without embarrassment, owing to the fixed attention with which the Prince of Wales honoured me. Indeed, some flattering remarks which were made by His Royal Highness met my ear as I stood near his box, and I was overwhelmed with confusion. The Prince's particular attention was observed by everyone, and I was again rallied at the end of the play. On the last curtsey the royal family condescendingly returned a bow to the performers ; but just as the curtain was falling, my eyes met those of the Prince of Wales ; and, with a look that I *shall never forget*, he gently inclined his head a second time. I felt the compliment, and blushed my gratitude. As I was going to my chair, I again met the royal family crossing the stage. I was again honoured with a very marked and low bow from the Prince of Wales."

Two or three days afterwards, she receives a visit from Lord Malden, who, after much hesitation and apologising, hands her a note. It is addressed to PERDITA. It contains only a few words, "but those expressive of more than common civility." They are signed FLORIZEL. She does not guess the writer until Lord Malden informs her it is the Prince of Wales. "I was astonished ; I confess

that I was agitated; but I was also somewhat sceptical as to the truth of his assertion. I returned a formal and doubtful answer; and his lordship shortly afterwards took his leave." She read the letter a thousand times, but still was doubtful of the writer, half-suspecting it was an experiment made by Lord Malden upon her vanity. The next evening the Viscount repeated his visit, and held forth upon the polished and fascinating manners of His Royal Highness, his engaging temper, his amiable sentiments. The day after he brings a second letter; assures her the Prince is most unhappy lest she should be offended at his conduct; he conjures her to go that night to the Oratorio, where he will by some signal convince, her should she be still sceptical upon the point, that he is the writer of the letter.

"I went to the Oratorio; and on my taking my seat in the balcony box, the Prince almost instantaneously observed me. He held the printed bill before his face, and drew his hand across his forehead; still fixing his eyes on me. I was confused, and knew not what to do. My husband was with me, and I was fearful of his observing what passed. Still the Prince continued to make signs, such as moving his hand upon the edge of the box as if writing, then speaking to the Duke of York (then Bishop of Osnaburgh), who also looked towards me with particular attention." These signs became so

marked as to be observed by the audience, and next day a certain publication observed that there was one passage in Dryden's Ode which seemed particularly interesting to the Prince of Wales, who

“ Gazed on the fair  
Who caused his care,  
And sighed, and looked, and sighed again.”

“ However flattering it might have been to female vanity to know that the most admired and most accomplished Prince in Europe was devotedly attached to me; however dangerous to the heart such idolatry as His Royal Highness, during many months, professed in almost daily letters, which were conveyed to me by Lord Malden, still I declined any interview. I was not insensible to all his powers of attraction; I thought him one of the most amiable of men. There was a beautiful ingenuousness in his language, a warm and enthusiastic adoration expressed in every letter, which interested and charmed me. During the whole spring, till the theatre closed, this correspondence continued; every day giving me some new assurance of inviolable affection.” During this time she had never once spoken with him. At length he sent her his miniature. Within the case was a small heart cut in paper; on one side was written “*Je ne change qu'en mourant,*” on the other, “Unalterable to my Perdita through life.”

Through the go-between, Lord Malden, she is informed that the Prince is almost frantic at her continual refusals to meet him, and with each letter becomes more and more passionately importunate.

“The unbounded assurances of lasting affection I received from His Royal Highness in many scores of the most eloquent letters, the contempt which I experienced from my husband, and the perpetual labour which I underwent for his support, at length began to weary my fortitude. Still I was reluctant to become the theme of public animadversion ; and still I remonstrated with my husband on the unkindness of his conduct.” At length she consents to meet the Prince at Kew. She dines with Lord Malden at the inn on the island between Kew and Brentford. A boat is to fetch her across in the twilight ; she is landed before the gates of the old palace, and she is met by the Prince and the Duke of York, who are walking down the avenue. But scarcely has the Prince uttered a few words before they are startled by the sound of voices approaching from the Palace. “The moon was now rising, and the idea of being overheard, or of His Royal Highness being seen out at so unusual an hour, terrified the whole group. After a few more words of the most affectionate nature uttered by the Prince, we parted, and Lord Malden and myself returned to the island.” Poor Perdita more than ever in love !

“The graces of his person, the irresistible sweetness of his smile, the tenderness of his melodious yet manly voice, will be remembered by me till every vision of this changeful scene be forgotten.” Such passages as these may excite a smile, but they portray the highly wrought sentimentalism of her character.

“Many and frequent were the interviews which afterwards took place at this romantic spot; our walks sometimes continued till past midnight; the Duke of York and Lord Malden were always of the party; our conversation was composed of general topics. The Prince had from his infancy been wholly secluded, and naturally took much pleasure in conversing about the busy world, its manners and pursuits, characters, and scenery. Nothing could be more delightful or more rational than our midnight perambulations; I always wore a dark-coloured habit; the rest of our party generally wrapped themselves in great-coats to disguise them, except the Duke of York, who almost universally alarmed us by the display of a buff coat, the most conspicuous colour he could have selected for an adventure of this nature. The polished and fascinating ingenuousness of His Royal Highness’s manners contributed not a little to enliven our promenades. He sang with exquisite taste; and the tones of his voice breaking upon the silence of the night have often appeared upon my entranced senses like more

than mortal melody. . . . The Duke of York was now on the eve of quitting the country for Hanover; the Prince was also on the point of receiving his first establishment; and the apprehension that this attachment might injure His Royal Highness in the opinion of the world rendered the caution, which was invariably observed, of the utmost importance. A considerable time elapsed in these scenes of visionary happiness. The Prince's attachment seemed to increase daily, and I considered myself as the most blest of human beings."

She had by this time relinquished her profession, her last appearance upon the stage being in May, 1780, in the character of Sir Harry Revel in the comedy of "The Miniature Picture," and as "The Irish Widow."

"On entering the greenroom, I informed Mr. Moody, who played in the farce, that I should appear no more after that night; and, endeavouring to smile while I sang, I repeated—

‘ Oh joy to you all in full measure,  
So wishes and prays the Widow Brady !’

which were the last lines of my song in ‘The Irish Widow.’ This effort to conceal the emotion I felt on quitting a profession I enthusiastically loved was of short duration; and I burst into tears on my appearance. My regret at recollecting that I was treading for the last time the boards where I had

so often received the most gratifying testimonies of the public approbation, where mental exertion had been emboldened by private worth, that I was flying from a happy certainty perhaps to pursue the phantom disappointment, nearly overwhelmed my faculties, and for some time deprived me of the power of articulation.

“The daily prints now indulged the malice of my enemies by the most scandalous paragraphs respecting the Prince of Wales and myself. I found it was too late to stop the augmenting torrent of abuse that was poured upon me from all quarters. Whenever I appeared in public, I was overwhelmed by the gazing of the multitude. I was frequently obliged to quit Ranelagh, owing to the crowd which, with staring curiosity, had assembled round my box; and, even in the streets of the metropolis, I scarcely ventured to enter a shop without experiencing the greatest inconvenience. Many hours have I waited till the crowd dispersed which surrounded my carriage in expectation of my quitting the shop. But, thank Heaven! my heart was not framed in the mould of callous effrontery. I shuddered at the gulf before me, and felt small gratification in the knowledge of having taken a step which many who condemned would have been no less willing to imitate, had they been placed in the same situation.”

The Prince omitted no mark of devotion it

was possible to bestow, even to presenting her with a bond for £20,000 upon his coming of age. "I was surprised at receiving this," she writes; "the idea of interest had never entered into my mind. Secure in the possession of his heart, I had in that delightful certainty counted all my future treasures. I had refused many splendid gifts, which he had proposed ordering for me at Grey's and other jewellers. The Prince presented to me a few trifling ornaments, not exceeding one hundred guineas. Even these, on our separation, I returned by the hands of General Lake."

But soon was she to be roughly awakened from this fool's paradise. His Royal Highness's "establishment" had scarcely been arranged, when she received a letter from him briefly telling her, "*We must meet no more.*" "And now suffer me to call God to witness that I was unconscious why this decision had taken place; only two days previous to this letter being written I had seen the Prince at Kew, and his affection appeared to be boundless as it was undiminished." Not two months previously he had sought opportunities of markedly, and as it seemed imprudently, distinguishing her in public. At the birth-night ball he had placed her in the chamberlain's box, and publicly sent to her two rosebuds, which a lady of rank had just presented to him, and commanded her to wear them in her bosom in the sight of the donor. At all places of public

resort, at the King's court, at reviews, at theatres, he paid her like daring attentions.

The whole affair was probably a deliberate plan from beginning to end. Those moonlight walks and nocturnal meetings had thrown a halo of poetry about the connection, and were the surest means of subduing her romantic and sentimental temperament. There is nothing wonderful in the fact that a young and neglected wife, united to an unworthy and dissipated husband, who lived upon her earnings, should listen to the passionate love of a handsome and accomplished prince, one "framed to make women false," for, although towards middle age he became coarse and bloated, there can be no question that in his early youth George IV. was not undeserving of that title which is now never quoted without a sneer, "the first gentleman in Europe." The woman who would have passed through such an ordeal, under the circumstances, would have been a miracle. Whether the Prince ever had any more attachment for her than for his other victims, it would be difficult to assert, but he decidedly made her the scapegoat of his interests. There had been some squabbling over the establishment, and it was conceded to him on condition that he should sacrifice his mistress to public opinion. She wrote him agonizing letters, but he made no reply; she went to Windsor, where he was then staying; he would not see her. "Women of every description were

emulous of attracting His Royal Highness's attention. Alas ! I had neither rank nor power to oppose such adversaries. Every engine of female malice was set in motion to destroy my repose, and every petty calumny was repeated with tenfold embellishments. Tales of the most infamous and glaring falsehood were invented, and I was again assailed by pamphlets, by paragraphs, by caricatures, and all the artillery of slander." Again she writes in the most agonised terms to her faithless lover, and at length he deigns to reply in a letter of eloquent evasions. She thinks of returning to the stage, but her friends are fearful of the reception an audience may accord her ; she is overwhelmed with debts to the amount of seven thousand pounds, and persecuted and insulted by harsh creditors. By-and-by the Prince consents to meet her at Lord Malden's house, declares he has never ceased to love her, and an apparent reunion takes place. But the very next day, in Hyde Park, he turns away his head, and affects not to know or see her.

Yet overwhelmed as she is by this blow, she cannot find in her heart one thought of resentment against him. " I did then, and ever shall, consider his mind as nobly and honourably organised. Nor could I teach myself to believe that a heart the seat of so many virtues could possibly become inhuman and unjust." Such love should have been lavished upon a more worthy object. By the persuasion of

her friends, however, she appealed to the bond he had sent her in the moment of his first ardour, and through Mr. Fox, ultimately obtained an annuity of five hundred a-year.

Of all the black spots that rest upon the character of this prince, there are few blacker than his treatment of this unfortunate lady; and how little blame was considered to attach to her, by those whom envy and malice did not render partial judges, is proved by the sympathy and friendship which she obtained from many persons of high standing in society. She paid a visit to Paris, where her appearance excited great curiosity; she was fêted by the Duc d'Orléans, probably with an object which, however, he never obtained; even the Queen desired to be introduced to "la belle Anglaise," and presented her with a purse knit with her own fingers.

There is little doubt she would have ultimately returned to the stage but for a terrible calamity which now befell her. While travelling abroad she went to sleep in her chaise with the windows open, caught a violent cold, which turned to rheumatics, and at twenty-four she had entirely lost the use of her limbs. Thus at an age when few women have scarcely more than entered into the world, she had been a wife, a mother, a successful actress, a prince's mistress, and—this terrible calamity had closed her career. Here is a sketch of her at this

time by a woman's bitter pen : " On a table in one of the waiting-rooms of the Opera House was seated a woman of fashionable appearance, still beautiful, but not in the bloom of beauty's pride. She was not noticed save by the eye of pity. In a few moments two liveried servants came to her, and took from their pockets long white sleeves, which they drew on their arms; they then lifted her up and conveyed her to her carriage—it was the then helpless, paralytic *Perdita*." She turned authoress, and wrote several volumes of poetry and some novels, not without merit, but of a sentimental character, but they have long since sunk into oblivion. Travelling to different places, trying different medicinal waters, all without effect, greatly reduced her means. She appealed to her noble friends for payment of money she had lent them in her prosperity. " Without your aid," she writes to one, " I cannot make trial of the Bristol waters, the only remedy that presents to me any hope of preserving my existence." The loan was not only not returned, but the letter remained unanswered. Boaden describes her in her latter years reclining helplessly in her chaise, a few friends about her, conversing quietly, a smile upon her lips, uttering no plaint, although her forehead was bedewed with drops of agony.

After enduring years of suffering—and what affliction could have been more terrible to this

woman, whose beauty had once enslaved every heart that came within its influence?—she expired, at Englefield Green, at the close of 1799, bequeathing another sad story to the chronicles of royal mistresses. She is buried in Old Windsor churchyard.

## CHAPTER VIII.

ROMANCE THE SECOND.—MRS. JORDAN.

Her Parentage—A Scoundrel—Tate Wilkinson's Description of her First Introduction to him—Dawning Fame—Overtures for London—Lessons in Acting—Jealous Rivals—Last Appearance at York—Her London Début—Imitators and Originals—Her Viola—The Secret of her Success—The Triumph of Comedy—Provincial Successes—The Duke of Clarence—Opprobium—Lady Teazle—A Terrible Blow—A Letter—The Terms of Separation—A Mystery—Last Scene of all—The Strange Account of her Death—A Supernatural Story—Three Peeresses : Miss Farren—Miss Brunton—Miss Mellon.

**A**FTER the great Siddons herself, the most famous actress of the Kemble period was MRS. JORDAN. The story of her life is as sad and romantic as even that of "Perdita."

She was born in Waterford, in the year 1762. Her mother, Miss Grace Philips, was the daughter of a poor Welsh clergyman, and, together with her two sisters, took to the stage. Of the father, Bland, little is known ; his family objected to the marriage, and obtained its nullification, on the grounds of his being a minor. But he did not desert his wife, at least for a time, for we hear of him occupying the

menial office of scene-shifter in the same theatre with her; but he early disappears out of the history, and is heard of no more. Dorothy—so was our heroine christened, although she afterwards changed it to Dora—made her first appearance upon the Dublin stage, under the name of Miss Francis, as Phœbe in “*As You Like It*,” when little more than a child. The slight glimpses we obtain of her early years are sadly suggestive. “From my first starting in life at the age of fourteen, I have always had a large family to support. My mother was a duty. But on brothers and sisters I have lavished more than can be supposed.” Poor child! Provincial salaries were then but miserable pittances, and we can imagine the struggles and privations she must have undergone. The mother was evidently a listless lymphatic personage with little moral strength, weakly dependent upon her daughter for support, loving her doubtless, in that maudlin maternal fashion, which is but a variety of selfishness, and regarding her interests only through the medium of her own; weakly yielding to circumstances, however evil or dishonourable might be their results, with no other resistance than whimpers and sighs over her hard fate, rather than risk the wretched pittance that stood between her and absolute privation. Such are too frequently actresses’ mothers, mere haridans, who fatten on their children’s industry—and disgrace. Daly, the manager of one of the

Dublin theatres at this time, was a most notorious scoundrel, who had defended his libertinism in sixteen duels; he would insidiously force loans upon the poor necessitous actresses, and then suddenly demand the payment with threats of arrest and discharge; if this did not suffice, if the proposed victim had the courage to face starvation, he did not scruple to resort to such acts of violence as would now condemn him to penal servitude, but which in the Ireland of that day seem to have gone unpunished. Miss Francis, it would appear from the hints of her biographer, Boaden, resisted his advances and met the usual fate.

At sixteen, she had already made a hit in one of her future great parts, Priscilla Tomboy, in "The Romp." A poor lieutenant in a marching regiment fell desperately in love with her, and offered to make her his wife. But the mother, foreseeing the future harvest her talents would bring forth, stepped between, and fearing to have the goose with the golden eggs snatched from her, carried it off to England.

Tate Wilkinson was an old friend of Mrs. Bland's, and to Leeds, where the company was then performing, she and her family wended their way. Faint and weary, their appearance denoting the penury of their circumstances, they arrived at the manager's house. The mother expatiated with all the eagerness of their desperate condition upon her

daughter's talents. "What is her line—tragedy, comedy, or opera?" he inquired. "ALL!" The reply was startling, and far from reassuring in its apparent exaggeration. Wilkinson describes the scene in his "Wandering Patentee." "Upon my suddenly seeing the family I withdrew for half-an-hour to reflect on what I should do, fearing a scrape from such a loaded connection, and not the least trait of comic power in the features or manners of the young lady, indeed, quite the reverse—dejected, melancholy, tears in her eyes, and a languor that, without the help of words, pleaded wonderfully for assistance." He asked her to recite a speech, but she was too tired and worn to comply. Upon which the old manager brought out a bottle of Madeira, and began to talk over old times with Mrs. Bland. The wine and cheerful conversation soon revived her spirits, and again he made a request for "a taste of her quality." She no longer refused, and gave a speech of Calista's, from "The Fair Penitent." The exquisite and plaintive melody of her voice, the distinctiveness of her articulation, the truth and nature that looked through her eyes, affected the old actor deeply, and overcame all his fears concerning her "loaded connection." The engagement was concluded, and her opening part was to be Calista: after which she requested to be allowed to sing "The Greenwood Laddie," a song in which she had made a great hit in Dublin.

Her success exceeded all expectation. "I was not only charmed," says Tate, "but the public also, and still more at what I feared would spoil the whole—the absurdity of Calista after her death jumping forth and singing a ballad; but on she came, in a frock and a little mob cap, and sung the song with such effect that I was fascinated."

From Leeds she proceeded with the company to York, and there changed her name from Miss Francis to Mrs. Jordan. The "Mrs." was substituted for the Miss at the dying request of an aunt, jealous of the family honour, and who left the young actress her wardrobe, a very valuable bequest to one in Dora's circumstances, on that condition. The name was selected by the manager—there had been a council upon the subject. "You have crossed the water, so I'll call you Jordan," he cried. The appropriateness is not exactly clear, but so runs the story.

Her success in the old cathedral city was as great as it had been at Leeds. Smith, of Drury Lane, was there at the time, it being the race week, and was so charmed by her performances that he attended the theatre every night. He even made overtures to her for London; but Tate had prudently bound her by articles for three years, at one guinea and a half a week, and nothing could be done until that term expired. In his "Wandering Patentee" he gives some amusing anecdotes of her at this period.

There was at the time a great, self-styled critic at York—such men were to be found in almost every town in the old theatrical days—a Mr. Cornelius Swan, who had annotated and altered Shakespeare, but whose great passion was to give lessons to every performer of merit who came to the city. He pretended to number the great John Kemble himself among his pupils. Tate introduced Mrs. Jordan to this luminary, and he said *he would teach her to act*. When she was ill, he was admitted to the little bed-chamber, where, by the side of the bed, with Mrs. Bland's old red cloak round his neck, he would sit and instruct his pupil in the part of Zara. "You must revive that tragedy, Wilkinson," said he, "for I have given the Jordan but three lessons, and she is so adroit at receiving my instructions, that I declare she repeats the character as well as Mrs. Cibber ever did; nay, let me do the Jordan justice, for I do not exceed the truth when I declare, Jordan speaks it as well as I could *myself*." Cornelius, in his fondness, adopted her as his child, but at his death did not leave her a shilling.

As a matter of course, all the ladies of the company were desperately jealous of the new-comer who so overleaped them, and displayed their mortification in sneers and annoyances, until it was remarked by the audience, that she constantly came upon the stage with her eyes red with weeping.

Upon which the truth came out; this only confirmed the public in her favour, and gave a new defeat to her enemies. Mrs. Bland, however, was not behind her daughter's rivals in malice and petty spite; sitting at the wing, one night, while a certain Mrs. Robinson, a very beautiful woman, was playing Isabella, she threw her apron over her eyes and begged Tate as an act of kindness to tell her when "that fright" had done acting and speaking, for it was so horrid she could not look at her. A few nights afterwards Mrs. Robinson remarked to the manager that she wondered he could allow the merit he did to Mrs. Jordan; for her own part she could not discover any, beyond a small share of mediocrity, and that when he lost his treasure, as he always called her, and *It* went to London, *It* would soon be turned back upon his hands, and be glad to return if he would accept *It*.

From which last observation it will be seen that we have arrived at the end of the three years' engagement, and that Mrs. Jordan's talents are about to be transferred to a more genial sphere than that ruled over by the Yorkshire manager. But the prophecies of her rivals were echoed by a greater authority. Mrs. Siddons acted with her, while playing in the north, and being told of her speedy removal to the metropolis, replied, with that tragedy queen's usual charitableness, that she had better remain where she was than venture upon the Lon-

don boards. The speaker had probably forgotten that Woodfall had once given her similar advice, to keep to small country theatres, as she was too weak for any other.

“Mrs. Jordan’s last appearance as a lady of my company at York,” writes Tate, “was on Friday, September 2, 1785, and her last night with me that year as a Yorkshire comedian was at Wakefield, on Friday, September 9, 1785, in the ‘Poor Soldier,’ from whence she set off with a doubtful heart for London city, dubious of success; but in a few weeks she made her *début*, and in a few nights after being seen, was so established in fame and favour, and so increasing on the public mind, that it is needless for me to tell the reader what he and she and everybody knows, how she fascinated, nay intoxicated, I may say, the London audience, and played at will-o’-the wisp, for as she moved they followed.”

“Whatever the rehearsals on the stage of Drury Lane might have shown of the new actress,” says Boaden, “the out-of-door world, I remember, was not much assailed; the puff-preliminary had not been greatly resorted to, and the common inquiries produced the usual answers of discretion. ‘I think she *is* clever; one thing I can tell you, she is like nothing you have been used to. Her laugh is good; but then she is, or seems to be, very nervous. We shall see; but I am sure we want *something*.’ At

length, on Tuesday, the 18th of October, 1785, the curtain drew up to the 'Country Girl' of Mrs. Jordan. This was a very judicious alteration by Garrick from the 'Country Wife' of Wycherley. . . . Perhaps no actress ever excited so much laughter. The low comedian has a hundred resorts by which risibility may be produced; but the actress has nothing beyond the mere words she utters, but what is drawn from her own hilarity and the expression of features, which never submit to exaggeration. How exactly had this child of Nature calculated her efficacy that no intention on her part was ever missed, and from first to last the audience responded uniformly in an astonishment of delight. In the third act they saw more clearly what gave the elasticity to her step; she is made to assume the male attire, and the great painter of the age pronounced her figure the neatest and most perfect in symmetry he had ever seen."

Mrs. Inchbald says:—"She at once displayed such consummate art, with such bewitching nature, such excellent sense, and such innocent simplicity, that her auditors were boundless in their plaudits, and so warm in her praises when they left the theatre, that their friends at home would not give credit to the extent of their eulogiums."

Mrs. Jordan first conceived her idea of hoydens from seeing a Mrs. Brown, one of Tate Wilkinson's company, in those parts. When that lady after-

wards appeared at Covent Garden as Miss Prue, people could only see an imitation of their favourite actress, and admirable as was her performance she made no impression. There is a similar story related in connection with Shuter. He had a friend, a tradesman named Tom Bennett, who at his club used to relate all Shuter's good stories, with an exact imitation of his manner. The comedian having heard of this, thought he would try the effect of his good things at first hand; so one evening he introduced himself at the club and told his stories in his best manner. But everybody had heard them before, and his auditors, to Shuter's mortification, sat gravely smoking their pipes. When he had finished one remarked to another, "How like Tom Bennett he is!"

Mrs. Jordan's first serious part was Viola in "The Twelfth Night," in which she appeared on the 11th of November. The London actresses were no more generous to her success than had been the provincial. "'Tis well enough," they sneered, while she can romp with a jump and a laugh, but what will they say to her in the loving and beloved Viola?" "Why," adds Boaden, "that the mere melody of her utterance brought tears into the eyes, and that passion had never had so modest and enchanting an interpreter." Her acting in this part has been described by Elia in one of his most exquisite passages:—

“Those,” he says, “who have only seen Mrs. Jordan within the last ten or fifteen years, can have no adequate idea of her performance of such parts as Ophelia, Helena in ‘All’s Well that Ends Well,’ and Viola in this play. Her voice had latterly acquired a coarseness, which suited well enough with her Nells and Hoydens; but in those days it sank, with her steady melting eye, into the heart. Her joyous parts (in which her memory now chiefly lives) in her youth were outdone by her plaintive ones. There is no giving an account how she delivered the disguised story of her love for Orsino. It was no set speech that she had foreseen, so as to weave it into an harmonious period, line necessarily following line, to make up the music. Yet I have heard it so spoken, or rather *read*, not without its grace and beauty; but when she had declared her sister’s history to be a ‘blank,’ and that ‘she never told her love,’ there was a pause, as if the story had ended; and then the image of the ‘worm i’ the bud’ came up as a new suggestion, and the brightened image of ‘patience’ still followed after that, as by some growing, and not mechanical, process, thought springing up after thought, I would almost say, as they were watered by her tears. So in those fine lines :—

‘ Write loyal cantos of contemned love,  
Hollo your name to the reverberate hills.’

There was no preparation in the foregoing image

made for that which was to follow. She used no rhetoric in her passion, or it was nature's own rhetoric, most legitimate then when it seemed altogether without rule or law."

In after years, when she had passed the meridian of her powers, her old friend Sir Jonah Barrington once inquired:—"How happens it that you still exceed all your profession, even in characters not so adapted to you now as when I first saw you? How do you contrive to be so buoyant, nay, so childish, on the stage, whilst you lose half your spirits and degenerate into gravity the moment you are off it?" "Old habits," replied Mrs. Jordan, "had I formerly studied my positions, weighed my words, and measured my sentences, I should have been artificial, and they might have hissed me: so, when I had got the words well by heart, I told Nature I was then at *her* service, to do whatever she thought proper with my feet, legs, hands, arms, and features. To her I left the whole matter; I became, in fact, merely her puppet, and never interfered further myself in the business. I heard the audience laugh at me, and I laughed at myself; they laughed again, so did I, and they gave me credit for matters I knew very little about, and for which Dame Nature, not I, should have received their approbation. The best rule for a performer is to forget, if possible, that any audience is listening. We perform best of all in our closets, and

next best to crowded houses; but I scarcely ever saw a good performer who was always eyeing the audience."

The charm of her acting was not to be analysed. A friend once told her he had detected it. "It is your *swindling* laugh," he said; "you have caught the hearty enjoyment of unrestrained infancy, delighting in its own buoyancy: and you have preserved this in children of a larger growth, who in the world are checked and blighted by decorum and art, authority and hypocrisy." That these eulogies upon her acting are not the exaggerations of a few enthusiastic admirers is proved by their universality. There were critics who carped even at the Siddons herself, and placed Mrs. Pritchard and Mrs. Cibber before her; but all agreed with marvellous unanimity that Mrs. Jordan was inimitable—not even the memory of Kitty Clive could cast a shadow upon her brilliancy. Leigh Hunt, who, however, wrote only of her latter years, remarks that in tragedy she had a monotonous plaintiveness, as though labouring to impress something very fine, like a person spouting a laborious quotation. "But in comedy," he adds, "she seems to speak with all her soul; her voice, pregnant with melancholy, delights the ear with a peculiar and exquisite fulness, and with an emphasis that appears the result of certain convictions; yet these convictions are the effect of a sensibility

willing to be convinced rather than of a judgment weighing its reason; her heart always precedes her speech, which follows with the readiest and happiest acquiescence. The subjection of the manner to the feelings has rendered Mrs. Jordan, in her younger days, the most natural actress of childhood, of its bursts of disposition and its fitful happiness."

Even stern Hazlitt is equally laudatory: "Mrs. Jordan's excellencies were all natural to her. It was not as an actress, but as *herself*, that she charmed everyone. Nature had formed her in her most prodigal humour; and when Nature is in the humour to make a woman all that is delightful, she does it most effectually. Her face, her tones, her manner, were irresistible; her smile had the effect of sunshine, and her laugh did one good to hear it; her voice was eloquence itself, it seemed as if her heart were always at her mouth. She was all gaiety, openness, and good-nature; she rioted in her fine animal spirits, and gave more pleasure than any other actress, because she had the greatest spirit of enjoyment herself."

Macready, in his "Reminiscences," has also left an enthusiastic record of the impression made upon him by her matchless powers: "If Mrs. Siddons," he says, "appeared a personification of the Tragic Muse, certainly all the attributes of Thalia were most joyously combined in Mrs. Jordan. With a

spirit of fun that would have out-laughed Puck himself, there was a discrimination, an identity with her character, an artistic arrangement of the scene, that made all appear spontaneous and accidental, though elaborated with the greatest care. Her voice was one of the most melodious I ever heard, which she could vary by certain bass tones, that would have disturbed the gravity of a hermit; and who that once heard that laugh of hers could ever forget it? The words of Milman would have applied well to her: 'Oh, the words laughed on her lips!' Mrs. Nesbitt, the charming actress of a later day, had a fascinating power in the sweetly-ringing notes of her hearty mirth. But Mrs. Jordan's laugh was so rich, so apparently irrepressible, so deliciously self-enjoying, as to be at all times irresistible. The contagious power would have broken down the conventional serenity of Lord Chesterfield himself."

When Mrs. Jordan came to London, tragedy, under Siddons, entirely monopolised the town, and on her off-nights the actors performed to empty benches. But with the arrival of the new goddess all was changed, and the houses were as crowded to witness her performances as to those of her tragic rival. In the line she chose for herself, however, she had no rival. High tragedy she left to Siddons; high comedy, for which she had not the polish and elegance of manners, to Miss Farren; but the romps, the boys, "the breeches' parts," and the youthful

and tender heroines of serious plays, she entirely monopolised. In the last, however, she was not always successful. Sheridan was greatly dissatisfied with her rendering of Cora in his "Pizarro," and her Imogen lacked power and dignity. In Rosalind she was greatly admired, but, it appears, did not admire herself. "Mrs. Jordan," says John Taylor in "Records of my Life," "though so full of spirit and apparently of self-confidence, was by no means vain of her acting. I remember sitting with her one night in the green-room of Covent Garden Theatre, when she was about to perform the part of Rosalind in 'As You Like It.' I happened to mention an actor who had recently appeared with wonderful success, and expressed my surprise at the public taste in this instance. 'Oh, Mr. Taylor, don't mention public taste,' said she, 'for if the public had any taste, how could they hear me in the part I play to-night, and which is far above my habits and pretensions.' Yet this was one of the characters in which she was so popular."

Ere the end of the first season, her salary, which had begun at £4, was tripled, with the addition of two benefits. Following the pernicious custom introduced by Mrs. Siddons, she now departed upon a provincial tour, and one of the first places she visited was Leeds. Not a twelvemonth had passed since she had played there at a guinea and a half a week, and taken a benefit to empty benches;

her terms were now half the receipts, after £15 had been deducted for expenses, and the houses were crammed to the ceiling. So much for the judgment of a provincial audience, whose only test of merit is the metropolitan stamp. The great hit of her next season at Drury Lane was Miss Prue, in Congreve's "Love for Love," an inimitable performance, as may be imagined from her style. Sir Harry Wildair came two seasons afterwards, and never had anything been seen like it since Peg Woffington played that delightful rake. Little Pickle in "The Spoiled Child," and Nell in "The Devil to Pay," were added to her list of successes.

It was in 1790 that her connection with the Duke of Clarence commenced. She had been living for some time under the protection of Mr. Ford, the son of one of the proprietors of Drury Lane, a City magistrate, and the one who made out the warrant for the arrest of Colonel Despard. It was generally believed at the time that they were legally married, as the lady took his name and had two daughters by him. When the Duke made overtures to her, she frankly told her protector, and offered to decline them if he would make her his wife. He refused, but afterwards pursued her with a malignancy which was as evil as it was despicable. He appears, according to Boaden, to have been a strange, unamiable man, of whom even the persons he constantly met knew little or no-

thing. The Duke was passionately fond of her, and in defiance of public opinion established her at Bushey, treating her as an honoured and beloved wife, and exacting from all who came thither a like respect. And during the twenty years they thus lived together, her conduct was as unexceptionable as though she had indeed been the Duchess. But public opinion, and the malice of the envious, visited their vengeance upon her for this breach of moral decorum in a hundred humiliating ways. Hissed by the audience, abused and maligned in the public prints, insulted in and out of the theatre, these were some of the penalties she paid for her elevation.

One morning, being a little petulant at rehearsal, Wroughton retorted with, "Why, you are grand, Madam, quite the Duchess again this morning." "Very likely," she replied, "for you are not the first person this day who has condescended ironically to honour me with this title." Then with all her characteristic humour, she told that having that morning discharged her Irish cook for impertinence, and paid the wages due to her, the woman banged a shilling down upon the table, crying, "Arrah, my honey, with this thirteener, won't I sit in the gallery, and won't your Royal Grace give me a curtsy—and won't I give your Royal Highness a howl and a hiss into the bargain!"

Her acting as Angela did something towards

securing the extraordinary success of "Monk" Lewis's once famous melodrama of "The Castle Spectre," which brought thousands to Sheridan's pocket in a forty-six nights' run. Lewis, arguing a point one day with the manager, offered to bet him all the money the play had brought into the treasury. "No, I won't do that," said Sheridan, "but I'll bet you all it's worth."

At King's farewell benefit (1812), Mrs. Jordan appeared for the first time as Lady Teazle; for she would never attempt the part until Miss Farren had quitted the stage. Her conception differed essentially from her predecessors' in this, according to their rendering the six months of fashionable life had totally divested my lady of her original habits, they did not *act* the fine lady, they seemed to have never occupied any other station than their present. Mrs. Jordan thought the rather coarse pleasantries which her ladyship lavished upon Sir Peter, were more in the tone of her *former* than her present condition, and she therefore returned to its frank and abrupt discontent: she quarrelled with her old rustic petulance, and showed her natural complexion. Yet she was said to want the recovering dignity of Abington when she advanced before the prostrate screen.

It is strange, considering her great genius, that she should have been so little written for, but there was a positive dearth of dramatists at this time, if

we except melodramatists, who were plentiful enough. The only one genuine comedy part she created was the Widow Cheerly, in Cherry's "Soldier's Daughter," a play which <sup>\*</sup>was highly successful in its day, but which is fast sinking, even in provincial towns, where the old-world theatre still lingers so reluctantly, into that oblivion to which so many finer works have been consigned.

But the years have been rolling on swiftly since the faultless form of twenty years first bounded upon the London stage, since those resistless eyes first fascinated every spectator, since that joyous laugh first thrilled every heart; the fragile figure has become too developed for grace, the girlish charm of the features is gone; the genius and the wonderful laugh are still left, but the public begin to think she does not exactly *look* Priscilla Tomboy, Little Pickle, or Miss Prue. And yet only twenty-four years have elapsed since that notable first night of "The Country Girl." What are twenty-four years amidst the brilliant triumphs of the stage? Looking back they seem but yesterday. And when at length the sense of failing powers and faded beauty is forced upon the actress, it is like waking her from the delicious dream of a single night—but a dream that can never come again. The Duke had long wished her to retire from professional life, for he had been quicker to perceive the dimming of the star, and naturally so, than she. And she had

promised to retire when Mrs. Siddons did so. Her loss in jewels and dresses in the destruction of Drury Lane was very large. Writing to a friend just afterwards, she says: "In obedience to the Duke's wishes I have withdrawn myself, at least for the present, until there is a royal theatre for me to appear in." She acted one night at the Opera House, whither the company had been transferred, for the benefit of the humbler sufferers by the fire. In another letter she intimated that, as it would possibly be her last appearance, a notification to that effect might be passed round the boxes. Yet almost immediately afterwards we find her starting on a starring tour through the provinces. But a terrible and most unexpected blow suddenly fell upon her.

While acting at Cheltenham she received a letter from the Duke to meet him at Maidenhead, there to bid each other farewell. It was the first intimation of the coming storm she had received. That night she was to play Nell, in "The Devil to Pay." She arrived at the theatre prostrated by a succession of fainting fits. She struggled through the part, however, until Jobson arrived at the passage where he has to accuse the conjuror of making her laughing drunk. Instead of a laugh she burst into tears. With great presence of mind the actor altered the text to "Why, Nell, the conjuror has not only made thee drunk, but *crying* drunk." After the curtain fell she was put into a chariot in her stage dress, to

keep her appointment with the Duke. The interview was, it need not be remarked, a strictly private one. Enemies had been constantly at work, Ford among the number, to poison the Duke's mind against her, and various infamous reports, all of which circumstantial evidence proves to have been false, were circulated against her. But there had been no quarrel, no warning, although rumours of a separation were bruited about, whether or not inspired by a knowledge of his intentions, of which she had been kept purposely in ignorance, it is impossible to determine. The connection had from the first exposed the Duke to constant attacks and remonstrances from real and pretended moralists, and constant dripping will wear a stone, much less a lover's constancy; then it was so much more easy to purge oneself of a pleasant sin, when the sin had grown fat and middle-aged; again, there was that clinging to the stage, of which he undoubtedly disapproved, and a daughter, by a former connection, and her husband, not very reputable personages either, as we shall presently see. Doubtless there had been a growing dissatisfaction, and some new rumour or some new annoyance, perhaps trifling in itself, had, as it often will, fanned the smouldering fire into a flame.

“My mind,” she says, in a letter written to a friend soon after the separation, “is beginning to feel somewhat reconciled to the shock and surprise

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it has lately received ; for could you or the world believe that we never had for twenty years the semblance of a quarrel ? But this is so well known in our domestic circle that the astonishment is the greater. Money, money, my good friend, or the want of it, has, I am convinced, made him at this moment the most wretched of men ; but having done wrong he does not like to retract. But with all his excellent qualities, his domestic virtues, his love for his lovely children, what must he not at this moment suffer ? His distress should have been relieved before ; but this is *entre nous*. All his letters are full of the most unqualified praise of my conduct ; and it is the most heartfelt blessing to know that, to the best of my power, I have endeavoured to deserve it. I have received the greatest kindness and attention from the R——t” (the Regent) “and every branch of the royal family, who in the most unreserved terms deplore this melancholy business. The whole correspondence is before the R——t, and I am proud to add that my past and present conduct has secured me a friend who declares he will never forsake me. ‘My forbearance,’ he says, ‘is beyond what he could have imagined !’ But what will not a woman do who is firmly and sincerely attached ? Had he left me to starve, I never would have uttered a word to his disadvantage. I enclose you two other letters, and in a day or two you shall have more, the rest being in the hands of the

R——t. And now, my dear friend, do not hear the Duke of Clarence unfairly abused. He has done wrong, and he is suffering for it. But as far as he has left it in his own power he is doing everything *kind* and *noble*, even to the distressing himself."

This sympathy of the Royal Family sufficiently proves that no disgraceful act on her part brought about the separation, while the affectionate terms in which she pleads for the man who had cast her off, displays the generosity of her mind. She continued to play, both in London and the provinces, until 1814, and during the last year of her professional career is said to have realised £7,000—a statement, however, which, although positively made by so good an authority as Sir Jonah Barrington, I am disposed to doubt.

Her eldest daughter, Frances, had married a Mr. Alsop, who was a clerk in the Ordnance Office. It was an unhappy match; he appears to have been a dissolute, extravagant man, who, ultimately overwhelmed with debt, was obliged to quit the country; previous to this, Mrs. Jordan had given him acceptances in blank upon stamped paper, which she supposed were for small amounts, but which he afterwards used for large ones. Before he left England she paid the money for the insurance of his life, and, making her daughter an allowance, sent her into Wales. This lady, whose character

was far from immaculate, afterwards went upon the stage, and appeared in 1815 as Rosalind. Hazlitt said, "She played the part with a certain degree of arch humour, but no more like her mother than we to Hercules."

Mrs. Jordan and the Duke, notwithstanding their separation, continued to be the subject of attack in the scurrilous newspapers and public prints of the day, until Mr. Barton, of the Mint, published a defence of His Royal Highness, in which he stated the terms of the separation which he himself had arranged. According to this statement she was allowed £1,500 a year for her maintenance, and £600 for carriages and horses for her four daughters by the Duke, and these were to remain under her care until a certain age, *provided she did not resume her profession*, in which event they were to be delivered over to his custody, she still being allowed the £1,500 a year for her own use, and £800 for her married daughters. With this statement was published the following letter from Mrs. Jordan, which I subjoin for the sake of the explanation it affords, and for the admirable light in which it places her.

"Sir,—Though I did not see the morning print that contained the paragraph alluded to in your liberal and respectable paper of yesterday, yet I was not long left in ignorance of the abuse it poured out against me. This I would silently have submitted to, but I was by no means aware that the

writer of it had taken the opportunity of throwing out insinuations which he thought might be injurious to a no less honourable than illustrious personage. In the love of truth, and in justice to His Royal Highness, I think it my duty, publicly and unequivocally, to declare that his liberality towards me has been noble and generous in the *highest degree*; but, not having it in his power to extend his bounty beyond the term of his own existence, he has, with his accustomed goodness and consideration, allowed me to endeavour to make that provision for myself which an event, that better feelings than those of *interest* make me hope I shall never live to see, would entirely deprive me of. This, then, sir, is my motive for returning to my profession. I am too happy in having every reason to hope and believe that, under these circumstances, I shall not offend the public at *large* by seeking their support and *protection*; and, while I feel that I possess those, I shall patiently submit to that species of unmanly persecution which a female so particularly situated must always be subject to. Ever ready to acknowledge my deficiencies in every respect, I trust, I may add, that I shall never be found wanting in candour and gratitude—not forgetful of the care that every individual should feel for the good opinion of the public.—I am, sir, etc., your much obliged, humble servant,

“DORA JORDAN.”

Writing to a friend, she says : “ When everything is adjusted, it will be impossible for me to remain in England. I shall, therefore, go abroad, appropriating as much as I can spare of the remainder of my income to pay my debts.” According to every account, these debts amounted to no more than £2,000. But even had they been double that amount, they should have been a mere bagatelle to a woman who had made a fortune by her profession, who was *supposed* to have just been repaid, *with interest*, a considerable sum lent to the Duke of Clarence, and to be in receipt of £1,500 a year. Her charities were considerable, and all her family were more or less dependent upon her ; two sons, the Fitzclarences, were in the Army, and probably drew heavily upon her resources. That a large portion of her earnings, during the twenty years they had been together, had been given over to the Duke, was an acknowledged fact, but it was averred that on the separation all had been paid back, and with interest, and that she herself signed a receipt for the same ; and yet, within a few years, during which she earned thousands more, we find her flying from her creditors for debts amounting to £2,000. The probabilities are that her devotion induced her to sign an acquittance, for which she received no equivalent. If so, we have an explanation of the Regent’s ambiguous phrase, which she quotes in her letter : “ *My forbearance is beyond what he could have*

*imagined.*" The payment even of the allowance is incompatible with the poverty in which her last days were passed. The picture of those days, as drawn by her friend Sir Jonah, is sad enough :—

"The apartments she occupied at St. Cloud were in a house in the square adjoining the palace. This house was large, gloomy, cold, and inconvenient, just the sort of place which would tell in a description in romance. In fact, it looked to me almost in a state of dilapidation. I could not, I am sure, wander over it at night without a superstitious feeling. The rooms were numerous, but small; the furniture scanty, old, and tattered. The hotel had obviously once belonged to some nobleman, and a long, lofty, flagged gallery stretched from one wing of it to the other. Mrs. Jordan's chambers were shabby; no English comforts solaced her in her later moments. In her little drawing-room, a small old sofa was the best-looking piece of furniture. On this she constantly reclined, and on this she died. The garden in her time was overgrown with weeds, and two melancholy cypress-trees pointed, and almost confined, her reflections to the grave." So poor did she seem, that a kind-hearted person even offered her assistance. Her circumstances, however, were not so bad as that, for she still retained some jewels of value, and a hundred pounds were found in the bank in her name after her death. Her effects, however, were sworn under £300.

What, then, became of the £1,500 a year she was supposed to be in receipt of?\*

As the end draws nearer and nearer, the picture grows more and more gloomy. She, who was once the very fountain of mirth and laughter, can now only lie all day long sighing upon a sofa, waiting in terrible anxiety for letters which never come. Each time the messenger returned from his fruitless journey to the post-office, to answer “None” to the eager questioning look that waited him, her despair and agony grew greater, to be succeeded by a torpor resembling death. From whom those letters were expected, or what was the nature of the news so ardently desired, none knew. We may guess, however, they should have been from the Duke—the fulfilment of his promises—and her despair was the result of finding herself so cruelly abandoned. Over the last scene of all there rests a strange mystery, which has never been satisfactorily cleared up.

Towards the latter end of June, 1816, Mrs. Jordan’s companion wrote to one of that lady’s daughters, informing her that her mother had died, after a few days’ illness, at St. Cloud. At the same time her death was announced in the morning journals. Three days afterwards a second letter was received from the same writer, saying that she

\* Barton of the Mint assured Taylor she had £2,500 at her disposal whenever she chose to demand it. It is evident she never did demand it. Why? That is another mystery.

had been deceived by Mrs. Jordan's appearance, and that she was still alive, but very ill. While the daughter was preparing to go to her, there came a third letter, announcing that Mrs. Jordan was really dead. General Hawkins himself then went to Paris to ascertain the fact, and arrived there three days after her interment. When Sir Jonah Barrington went to St. Cloud, to gather the particulars of his poor friend's death, the landlord of the house in which she died gave him a most minute description of the sad event: how, upon his returning from the post-office with the old report of "No letters," she had fallen back, and almost instantly expired. *Yet he made no mention of the resuscitation.* This total forgetfulness of so extraordinary an event, if it ever took place, is, to say the least, remarkable. In consequence of these discrepancies, a report got abroad that she was not really dead. Boaden himself was strongly impressed with this belief, from a circumstance which I will relate in his own words:—

"The dear lady was not an every-day sort of woman. She was near-sighted, and wore a glass attached to a gold chain about her neck; her manner of using this to assist her sight was extremely peculiar. I was taking a very usual walk before dinner, and I stopped at a bookseller's window on the left side of Piccadilly, to look at some new publication that struck my eye. On a sudden a lady stood by my side who had stopped with a similar

impulse ; to my conviction it was Mrs. Jordan. As she did not speak but dropped a long white veil immediately over her face, I concluded that she did not wish to be recognised, and therefore, however I should have wished an explanation of what surprised me, I yielded to her pleasure upon the occasion." About the same time and without any knowledge of the above circumstance, her daughter, Mrs. Alsop, believed she saw her mother in the Strand ; so terrible was the shock to her that she fell down in a fit, and could never be convinced to her dying day that she had been deceived.

The Duke ever cherished her memory with a profound respect. While giving a private performance at Bushey, Mathews was struck by an admirable portrait of Mrs. Jordan. "I know you have a fine collection of theatrical portraits," said the Duke, observing his glance, "but I hope you have not one like that—I mean so good a one—I should not like anybody to have so good a one." Mathews replied that he was not so fortunate as to possess one so excellent as that. The Duke then gazed upon the picture, saying, with emotion and strong emphasis, "She was one of the best of women, Mr. Mathews." The manner in which the words were spoken was so affecting that it drew tears from the auditor. The Duke perceiving it, kindly pressed his hand, and added, "You knew her, Mathews, therefore you must have known her

excellence." He then placed a small case in his hand, and said, "Mathews, I am not rich enough to remunerate such talent as yours, or make a suitable return for your kind exertions last night, which delighted us all; but I hope you will gratify me by the acceptance of the contents of this little purse" (a £50 note) "for the purpose of purchasing some small addition to your collection of paintings, in remembrance of me and of the original of the portrait."

There is little doubt he had good cause for such feelings. When he became King, he elevated her eldest son to the Peerage as Earl of Munster, and gave precedence to her other sons and daughters.

A famous name in theatrical annals of this period is MISS FARREN. Yet, notwithstanding its brilliant and somewhat romantic climax, there is very little that is interesting to be told about her professional career. Her father began life as an apothecary in Cork, but threw up his business to join a strolling company. After wandering and starving for some time in Ireland, he went over to Liverpool and there married an innkeeper's daughter. The young couple now strolled together, and brought their children up to the same profession. The father died some ten or twelve years after his marriage, leaving behind two daughters, of which the future peeress was the younger. The elder thereafter attained some celebrity as Mrs. Knight. Both

seem to have performed from their earliest years with their mother, in the miserable strolling companies which perambulated Ireland at this time. Elizabeth's first appearance in a regular theatre was at Liverpool in 1793, as Rosetta in "Love in a Village," she being then scarcely fifteen years of age. The following year she was engaged at Birmingham, where it is said, she eked out her small salary by carrying the other actresses' dresses to and from the theatre. It was Mr. Younger, the Liverpool manager, who recommended her to Colman, and she opened at the Haymarket as Miss Hardcastle, in 1777, with considerable success. The next winter she played tragedy parts at Covent Garden, but made little progress. Upon the retirement of Mrs. Abington she went over to Drury Lane, and in Lady Townley and Lady Teazle was at once hailed as the successor of that great actress. But, although most admirable in the fine ladies of comedy, she never equalled Abington. She was thin, above the middle height, with an expressive face and a clear voice. She was said to have been gifted with the grace of delicacy above all comedy actresses, and that even in delivering the dialogue of Congreve, though her eye sparkled with intelligence, she was always chaste. She had a host of noble lovers sighing at her feet, but they all sighed in vain, even the Earl of Derby, until he could make her his Countess. It is related how he was fre-

quently seen following her home from Drury Lane to Grosvenor Square, she scarcely vouchsafing a smile, or a look even, to his eager speeches. This courtship continued for eighteen years, until the death of the first Lady Derby, from whom the Earl had long been separated. Miss Farren took leave of the stage in 1797, one month before her marriage. The younger Colman used to tell a story, how her mother, when Miss Farren was first at the Haymarket, was in the habit of bringing her hot dinners, with gravy and vegetables, during long rehearsals, and yet he could never detect her bringing any plates and dishes into the theatre. At last he discovered the secret. She brought the food in *her pocket, which was lined with tin for the purpose.*

LOUISA BRUNTON was an actress more beautiful than talented. Her father was a provincial manager, and she made her first bow to a London audience in Juliet in 1785. Her style was as refined as her person was charming, but Boaden describes her as "a mere declaimer of passion." She retired from the stage to become Countess of Craven.

MISS MELLON, without possessing any very striking abilities, would seem to have been a very charming actress. Leigh Hunt praises her chiefly for her "chambermaids." "She catches with wonderful discrimination their probable touches of character and manner." In other parts he complains that she had "a vulgar shortness of speech." While

she was acting with a strolling company at Stafford, Sheridan was on a visit to a banker in the town; the daughters of this gentleman took a great interest in the young actress, whose private character was most estimable, and persuaded him to go and see her act. He discovered such promise in her performance that he engaged her for Drury Lane, where she appeared as Lydia Languish in 1797. Her first acquaintance with Mr. Coutts began with his sending her five guineas for a benefit ticket. Those coins she never parted with, keeping them as a memento. In 1815 she became his wife, and retired from the stage. After his death she was married to the Duke of St. Albans. But the vast fortune left her by her first husband she bequeathed to the daughter of Sir Francis Burdett, who, by her noble generosity to the theatrical profession, has ever shown herself mindful of the source whence she derived it.



Part C.



THE KEAN AND MACREADY PERIOD.



## CHAPTER I.

### EDMUND KEAN : HIS EARLY STRUGGLES.

His Doubtful Parentage—Miss Tidswell—His First Appearance on any Stage—His Erratic Habits—First Meeting with Charles Young—Boy Actor and Imitator—Rescued from Vagabondage—A Cabin Boy—A Swim across the Thames—Mrs. Siddons' Prediction—A Great Man for Once—Mary Chambers—Married—A Terrible Journey—Sheridan Knowles' First Play—Miserable Wanderings—Provincial Criticism—Braving Brutes—In Despair—A Rent in the Clouds—Engaged for Drury Lane—New Difficulties—"Shylock or Nothing"—Discouragement and Contumely—A Fatal Prophecy.

**B**OTH the parentage and the date of the birth of Edmund Kean are doubtful. There is not only an uncertainty about the father, a by no means uncommon circumstance in this world, but, what is very much rarer, there is a suspicion even concerning the mother. Miss Tidswell, an actress, has sometimes been accredited with bringing him into the world, and even Kean himself seems to have entertained this belief—"for why," says he, "did she take so much trouble over me?"—while to no less a personage than a Duke of Norfolk has been given the honour of his paternity. One day in the

lobby of Drury Lane Theatre, Lord Essex openly accused his Grace of the fact, and asked him why he did not acknowledge his son. The Duke protested his friend was mistaken, and added that if it were so, he should be proud to own him. Edmund's reputed mother, however, was a strolling actress, named Nance Carey. Her father was a strolling player; her grandfather, Henry Carey, dramatist and song writer, and author of the sweet old lyric, "Sally in our Alley," was the natural son of the great Lord Halifax. Edmund's reputed father was one Kean, who is variously represented as a tailor and a builder. Some say the child was born in Castle Street, Leicester Square, others in a miserable garret in Ewer Street, Southwark; and 1787-88-89 have been assigned as the date of that event.

We hear nothing about the father; whoever he might have been, he seems to have taken no heed of his son from the time the latter came into the world. Neither was the mother more natural in her conduct; she abandoned him to the care of the before-named Miss Tidswell, who seems to have been the only person who attended on her in her miserable confinement.

"Before the piece ('Cymon') was brought out," writes Michael Kelley, "I had a number of children brought to me, that I might choose a Cupid. One struck me, with a fine pair of black eyes, who seemed, by his looks and little gestures, most

anxious to be chosen as the representative of the God of Love. I chose him, and little did I then imagine that my little Cupid would eventually become a great actor: the then little urchin was neither more nor less than Edmund Kean." The boy was at that time three years of age. He was one of the imps that danced around the cauldron in John Kemble's revival of "Macbeth;" one night he mischievously invited his companions to play some freak, not in their parts, and then tumbled them over "like a pack of cards," for which he was well thumped by John Philip. During this time Miss Tidswell was sending him to a school in Orange Court; he was a weakly child, with bent legs and grown-out ankles, which necessitated the use of irons until he was seven years old. His uncle, Moses Kean, who gave entertainments at the Lyceum Theatre and other places, took some notice of the boy, instructed him in Shakespeare, had him taught dancing by d'Egville, the ballet master, and fencing by Angelo. At a very youthful age he was a match with the foils for almost any one who entered the school, and was all his life renowned for his mastery of that accomplishment. But he was a born Bohemian, and would leave his home, sometimes for weeks together, to wander about the country with acrobats and tramps; once he was found in a low public-house in St. George's Fields tarred and feathered, giving songs and recitations.

Moses Kean dying, Miss Tidswell again took charge of him, and procured him an engagement for childrens' parts at Drury Lane, where he played Arthur to Mrs. Siddons' Lady Constance. One night Mrs. Charles Kemble hearing a noise in the green-room, inquired what was the matter, "Oh, it is little Carey reciting Richard the Third after the manner of Garrick," was the reply; "go and see him, he is really very clever." Long before he had arrived at his teens, he gave imitations of Bannister and other famous actors. Miss Tidswell took great pains with her rebellious pupil, made him study all the great parts of Shakespeare, and rehearse them under her supervision; he also used to rehearse them with a boy about his own age, named Rae, who thereafter became a mediocre tragedian. When Miss Tidswell chastised him for his delinquencies he ran away from her, as he had from his uncle, for which he was tied up all day to a bed-post.

Once he was dragged home by a rope through the streets; at another time she bound a brass collar round his neck, as though he had been a dog of erratic habits; upon the collar was inscribed, "Theatre Royal, Drury Lane."

By-and-by his mother, discovering that he might be of use to her, after a long disappearance, turned up again, claimed him, and took him away from his protectress. A more disreputable vagabond than Nance Carey it would be difficult to conceive;

when strolling failed, she tramped the country with perfumes and face powders, and such like commodities. Edmund carried the merchandise, and, when the opportunity presented itself, recited scenes and speeches from plays, as he had been taught by Miss Tidswell, at taverns and farms, and sometimes at gentlemen's houses.

Among Miss Carey's customers was Mr. Young, a surgeon, the father of the future great tragedian. And it is related in the life of the latter how once, after a dinner-party in that gentleman's house, the young vagrant was had in to recite, while his mother waited in the hall, and how beside his father's chair stood a handsome boy of ten, named Charles. And so strangely, at the beginning of their lives, met the two men who were thereafter to be rivals on the London stage. Mr. Young recommended Nance's wares to a Mrs. Clarke, of Guildford Street. Wherever she went she talked about the talents of her son, which brought her in far more money than her perfume bottles and pomatum, and her crafty eulogies soon excited a curiosity in Mrs. Clarke to see this prodigy. His first introduction to this lady is thus graphically described by Barry Cornwall in his "Life of Kean :"—

"The door was thrown open, and a pale, slim boy of about ten years old entered, very poorly clad, ragged, with dirty hands, face washed, delicate skin, brilliant eyes, superb head of curled and matted

hair, and a piece of hat in his hand. With the bow and air of a prince, he delivers his message: 'My mother, madam, sends her duty, and begs you will be so good as to lend her a shilling to take her spangled, tiffany petticoat out of pawn, as she wants it to appear in at Richmond to-morrow.' 'Are you the little boy who can act so well?' inquires the lady. A bow of assent and a kindling cheek were the sole reply. 'What can you act?' 'Richard the Third, Speed the Plough, Hamlet, and Harlequin,' was the quick answer. 'I should like to see you act.' 'I should be proud to act to you.' "

And so it was arranged that he should give her a specimen of his powers that evening. Several friends were invited to witness the performance. At a little after six, there came—"The same thundering rap which had preceded his advent in the morning. His face was now clean, the delicacy of his complexion was more obvious than before, and his beautiful hair had been combed, and shone like a raven's wing. His dress had indeed suffered no improvement, but a frilled handkerchief of his mother's was stuck inside his jacket, and was more than a substitute for a shirt collar."

The lady takes him away to her dressing-room to make some improvement in his costume, puts him on a black riding-hat and feathers, which she turns up at one side with pins; a sword and belt are also found and buckled round his waist. These appen-

dages to his everyday rags certainly give the boy a somewhat comical appearance, and would excite the risibility of the guests, but for the intense earnestness with which he dashes to the further end of the room, which has been fixed upon for the stage, and where there are curtains and a door for exit, and before the people have time to laugh begins his recitation. "It was no small task that lay before him," continues his biographer, "to face the smiles of an audience sceptical of his talents, and to conquer them. Yet he did this, nay, more; for the expression in the countenances of his audience changed from contempt or distrust into attention, from attention to admiration—to silent wonder—to tears." A shower of sixpences and shillings rewarded his efforts, but he refused to pick them up, and they were with difficulty forced upon him. Such was the boy's pride when free from the baneful influence of his vagabond mother.

This acting led to important consequences. Mrs. Clarke, struck by the boy's talents and pitying his condition, prevailed upon her husband to allow her to take him under her protection. She placed him at school, had him taught riding, fencing, dancing; and treated him as though he had been her own child, and he in return continued to delight her and her friends by his recitations. This lasted nearly two years. One day a man and woman and their daughters came on a visit to Guildford Street; it was arranged

they were all to go to the theatre that night, and mention was made of young Kean accompanying them. "What, does *he* sit in the box with us!" exclaimed the snob. They were at dinner when these words were spoken; the boy, crimson with mortification, dashed down his knife and fork, rose from the table, left the room and the house, resolving never again to enter it. He walked to Bristol, with the intention, it would seem, of getting on board ship as cabin-boy, but failing in the attempt trudged back to London, supporting himself on the way by reciting at public-houses. One morning he was found by a man who knew him, ragged and footsore, upon a dung-heap in a mews in the neighbourhood of his former home, and was taken back thither. But such behaviour could scarcely be pardoned; after giving him some money collected at a farewell performance, she got up as a sort of benefit, the lady dismissed her *protégé*, of whom she was weary, and in whom was so strangely combined the pride of an aristocrat and the tastes of a gipsy. After this we find him, together with his mother, one of the company of Richardson's Show. His acting at Windsor Fair excited so much attention that King George sent for him to the Castle; and His Majesty was so highly pleased with his talents that he made him a present of two guineas. When in London, he recited at various places of amusement. A lady speaking to

him one day, when he was the all famous actor, of certain entertainments that used to be given in Leicester Place, remarked:—"I used to be very much pleased with a person who spoke poetry at the Sans Souci." "Do you wish to know who it was that spouted poetry?" said Kean, turning head over heels in the drawing-room in Clarges Street, "Know then 'twas I!"

During one period of his boyhood Kean went to sea as a cabin-boy. A recent biographer, Mr. Hawkins, says he was only eight years old when this escapade took place, but it seems highly improbable that any captain would have taken such a mere child, small and weakly too for its age. Barry Cornwall makes him about eleven or twelve at the time. Be this as it may, he grew sick of his new calling long before the voyage (to Madeira) was completed: pretended to be deaf, then to lose the use of his limbs, and counterfeited so well as to deceive everybody, the doctors at Madeira included. On the homeward passage the ship was overtaken by a terrible storm, but not even that could frighten him out of the deception. Upon being carried on shore at Portsmouth, he suddenly slipped out of the hands of the men who were bearing him to the hospital, did a few steps of the college hornpipe and fled.

In 1804 Jerrold informs us that Kean joined his father's company at Sheerness; he still dressed as a boy, and still retained his mother's name of Carey.

He opened in *George Barnwell* and *Harlequin*. He played the whole round of tragedy, comedy, opera, farce, pantomime, and sang comic songs, and all for fifteen shillings a week! Not being of provident habits, and already giving way to dissipation, such a stipend left little for times of enforced idleness. The want of the smallest coin frequently put him to terrible shifts. Once being at Rochester without a penny to pay the ferry toll, he, with his whole wardrobe tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, and slung round his neck, swam across the river. A few years afterwards, while proceeding to an engagement at Braintree in Essex, he found himself on the Kentish shore in the same impecunious condition. There was nothing for it but to swim across the Thames, which he accordingly did. He was to open that night in *Rolla*. All wet as he was, he set forward towards his destination, and arrived just in time to dress, without being able to procure any refreshment. But exhausted nature gave way, he fainted in the middle of a scene. A fever and an ague were the results of that day's work.

In 1806 Miss Tidswell procured him an engagement at the Haymarket to play small parts—they were very small indeed, servants, alguazils, messengers—while his old boy friend, Rae, was playing principal business. Yet he worked hard to make the most of them. "Look at that little man," sneered an actor one night, "he is trying to make

a part out of nothing!" But his restless ambition could not remain content in so subordinate a position, and the next year we find him at Belfast, where for the first time he had the honour of playing with Mrs. Siddons. His first part with her was Osmyn, in "Zara;" he was grossly imperfect, and intoxicated as well, and excited the great lady's supreme disgust. But the next night he more than redeemed himself, at least as an actor, by his performance of Young Norval. The star pronounced that he played "well, *very* well, but," she added with a lofty look, "it's a pity, there's too little of you to do anything." She little thought he was one day destined to snatch the sceptre from the Kemble grasp. Next we find him at Tunbridge Wells at eighteen shillings a week, taking a benefit, and insisting upon the printer setting his name in the largest type in the office, with, "I will be a great man for once." Alas, the big type brought only five pounds into the house. After that, he returned to Sheerness to play everything, for one guinea a week, which, however, was an advance of six shillings upon his former stipend. One night while he was performing Alexander the Great, in Lee's tragedy, some officers in the stage-box annoyed him by laughing and calling out "Alexander the Little." At length, unable to endure this any longer, he advanced with folded arms, and a look that appalled the sneerers, close to the box and

said, "Yes, but with a *great soul!*" Jerrold, writing of his versatility and ingenuity, says, "all the models for the tricks of the pantomime of 'Mother Goose,' as played at Sheerness, were made by him out of matches, pins, and paper."

At Gloucester, his next engagement, he met his future wife, Mary Chambers, a Waterford girl, who had been a governess, and had then just entered the theatrical profession. Their first introduction did not at all promise such a catastrophe as matrimony. "Who is that shabby little man?" she inquired of the manager, as he stood at the wings. The piece they first played in together was "Laugh when you can." The lady was Mrs. Mortimer, Kean, Sambo; he was very imperfect, and when they came off the stage, Miss Chambers, very angry and almost crying, reproached him with, "It is very shameful, sir, that you should not know a word of your part." Kean made no reply, but went to the manager and asked, "Who the devil is that?" Master Betty, the "Young Roscius," came to Gloucester to "star," and Kean was cast Laertes to his Hamlet. On the day of the performance he disappeared; for three days and three nights no tidings could be heard of him; men were sent out in all directions to seek him, and he was found at last returning to the town. He went at once to the lodgings of Miss Chambers, to whom he was now engaged.

"Where *have* you been Mr. Kean?" was her anxious query.

"In the fields, in the woods, I am starved, I have eaten nothing but turnips and cabbages since I have been out. But I'll go again to-morrow, and again and again, and as often as I see myself put in for such a character. I'll play seconds to no man, save John Kemble."

He and Miss Chambers, who was eight years his senior, were united in 1808, for which act Mr. Beverley, the father of the celebrated artist, discharged them from his company, on the plea that they had thereby forfeited what little attraction they might have possessed. But they soon afterwards obtained an engagement at Birmingham at £1 1s. each per week; this was afterwards increased ten shillings, in consideration of his acting harlequin. No contrast can be more striking than that between the past and present of theatrical salaries both in town and country; a leading actor in such a theatre as Birmingham would now command six or eight pounds a week.\* While fulfilling this engagement he played with Stephen Kemble, who told him he had acted Hotspur as well as his brother, John.

He seems never to have remained long in one engagement; his proud impetuous temper, which could endure neither reproof nor humiliation, and his irregular habits, brought about continual dis-

\* See Appendix D.

agreements with his managers, and constant changes. Hence the miseries he endured; for even in those days of pitiful salaries the country actor, if provident, could contrive to live in respectability; but Kean suffered under a chronic destitution.

Birmingham did not long contain this erratic spirit; his next destination was Swansea. But ere he could leave the former town he had to borrow two pounds of his new manager to clear his liabilities, and then walk the journey, with a wife within a few weeks of her confinement. Barry Cornwall gives a sad but striking picture of this journey. "Kean, dressed in blue from head to foot, with his dark, sharp, resolute face, a black stock, and four swords over his shoulder suspending the family bundle of clothes, looked like a poor little navy lieutenant whom the wars had left on half-pay and penniless, trudging on with his wife to his native village." They had started with only a few shillings, and upon arriving at Bristol, found themselves penniless and obliged to write to Swansea for another loan, which, when it came, was nearly all swallowed up by the expenses they had incurred while waiting for it. They obtained a passage to Newport in a barge laden with hemp and tar, and thence proceeded to their destination on foot. Sometimes they encountered good Samaritans who would not take their money for the frugal meal they ordered; at others, brutes who refused a drink of

milk to the poor and footsore woman who scarcely knew an hour she might not be seized with premature pangs of maternity.

Not long enough, however, for the child to be born, did they remain at Swansea; that event took place at Waterford, in September, 1809. The baby was christened Charles. He was still under the same manager, Cherry, however. At Waterford he met the afterwards celebrated dramatist, Sheridan Knowles, then an obscure actor like himself; and for Kean, was written his first play, "Leo the Gipsy," in which he made a great success. It was never published, and the manuscript was lost. Grattan describes his benefit performance in this town:—"The play was Hannah More's tragedy of 'Percy,' in which he, of course, played the hero. Elwina was played by Mrs. Kean, who was applauded to her heart's content. Kean was so popular, both as an actor and from the excellent character he bore, that the audience thought less of the actress's demerits than of the husband's feelings; and besides this, the *débutante* had many personal friends in her native city, and among the gentry of the neighbourhood, for she had been governess to the children of a lady of good fortune, who used all her influence at this benefit. After the tragedy, Kean gave a specimen of tight-rope dancing, and another of sparring with a professional pugilist. He then played the leading part in a musical inter-

lude, and finished with Chimpanzee, the monkey, in the melodramatic pantomime of 'La Pérouse,' and in this character he showed agility scarcely since surpassed by Mazurier and Gouffé, and touches of deep tragedy in the monkey's death scene, which made the audience shed tears."

By this benefit he realised forty pounds. But soon afterwards we find him penniless at Dumfries, hiring a room at a public-house for an entertainment, to which one sixpence is paid for admission. From Dumfries he and his wife and children trudge on to Carlisle; the Assizes are on, and he writes a letter to the barristers, proposing to recite and sing to them and leave the reward to their own generosity. But they will none of him. So the landlord of the tavern he is staying at gives him the use of a room, and he sends out the bellman to announce his entertainment. He has better luck than at the Scotch town, for he takes enough money to discharge his bill and carry him to York.

At York he arrived utterly destitute. So extreme was his need that he presented himself for enlistment as a common soldier, but an officer attached to the regiment good-naturedly dissuaded him from his project. More than once his poor wife had knelt down by the bed-side of her half-famished children, and prayed that they and herself might be at once released from their sufferings by death. The wife of a dancing-master, Mrs. Nokes, hearing

of their distress, visited them in the miserable public-house in which they had taken shelter, and upon going away put something in Mrs. Kean's hand, which proved to be a five-pound note. She also prevailed upon her husband to lend him the room in which he gave his lessons, for an entertainment. This entertainment consisted of scenes from plays, songs, and imitations of London actors. Nine pounds were the receipts, and with this the poor strollers started for London. The journey was done partly on foot, partly in waggons, Kean carrying the eldest boy much of the way. Soon after arriving in town he was engaged by Hughes of Sadler's Wells, who also had the Exeter Theatre, to go down to the old western city to "play everything," for two pounds a week, the largest salary he had ever received. He and Hughes had acted together in Gloucester, where they announced a joint benefit; but the entire receipts of the house amounting only to eighteenpence, they went hand-in-hand before the curtain and thanked and dismissed their patrons. Before leaving London, he went to see Kemble in Wolsey. When he returned home he began to imitate him. "Shall I ever walk those boards?" he exclaimed. "*I will*, and make a hit."

The good people of Exeter appreciated his Harlequin more than his tragic heroes. His conduct there seems to have been very irregular. Once he ab-

sented himself from home for three days. To the question of where he had been, he replied grandiloquently, "I have been doing a noble action; I have been drinking these three days with a brother actor, who is leaving Exeter, to keep up his spirits!" From Exeter he proceeded to Guernsey, and thus a sapient provincial critic there noticed his *début*:—

"Last night a young man, whose name, the bills said, was Kean, made his first appearance as Hamlet, and truly his performance of the character made us wish that we had been indulged with the country system of excluding it and playing all the other characters. This person has, we understand, a high character in several parts of England, and his vanity has repeatedly prompted him to endeavour to procure an engagement at one of the theatres in the Metropolis; the difficulties he has met with have, however, proved insurmountable, and the managers of Drury Lane and Covent Garden have saved themselves the disgrace, to which they would be subject by countenancing such impudence and incompetency. Even his performance of the inferior characters of the drama would be objectionable, if there was nothing to render him ridiculous by one of the vilest figures that has been seen either on or off the stage; and if his mind was half so qualified for the representation of Richard the Third, which he is shortly to appear in, as his person is suited to the deformities with which the tyrant is supposed to have been distinguished from his fellows, his success would be most unequivocal. As to his Hamlet, it is one of the most terrible misrepresentations to which Shakespeare has ever been subjected. Without grace or dignity he comes forward; he shows an unconsciousness that any one is before him; and is often so forgetful of the respect due to an audience, that he turns his back upon them in some of those scenes in which contemplation is to be indulged, as if for the purpose of showing his abstractedness from all ordinary subjects. His voice is harsh and monotonous, but, as it is deep,

answers well enough the idea that he entertains of impressing terror by a tone which seems to proceed from a charnel-house."

"The effect of this stricture," to again quote Mr. Hawkins, "upon the unruly and indiscriminating rabble which usually graced the interior of the Guernsey theatre, may be readily conceived. Too courageous to bow before the inevitable tempest, Kean made his appearance in 'Richard the Third.' Shouts of derisive laughter, followed by a storm of sibilation, broke from all parts of the house as he came on the stage. For a time his patience was proof against an opposition which he hoped to subdue by the merits of his acting, but, as no sign of abatement appeared, he boldly advanced to the front, and, with an eye that seemed to emit bright and deadly flashes, applied to them with tremendous emphasis the words of his part. 'Unmannered dogs, stand ye when I command.' For a moment the audience were taken aback by this unexpected resistance; all became as noiseless as the gathering storm before the tempest, and the clamour only revived when a stalwart fellow, in his shirt sleeves, yelled out from the back of the pit a demand for an 'apology.' 'Apology!' cried the little man, and his form dilated with excitement; 'take it from this remark, the only proof of intelligence you have yet given is in the proper application of the words I have just uttered.' The uproar which succeeded this retort rendered the interference of the manager

imperative. Kean was hurried off the stage, and the part given to an outsider immeasurably less talented than his predecessor, but who stood high in favour with the discerning and enlightened audience in front."

The Governor took up his cause, however, and assisted in getting him up a house to an entertainment, in which his young boy Howard, still a mere child, appeared. From Guernsey he passed over to Torbay, to Brixham, and issued his usual bill; but this was worse than Dumfries, for here not a soul came. Then he returned to Exeter, but his conduct had been so bad during his previous sojourn there, that all his old friends turned their backs upon him. He obtained for his benefit, however, the patronage of a gentleman of some influence, named Buller; yet because the butler happened to say in his presence, "You will be sure to have a good house, as my master patronises the play," Kean's pride took fire, he vowed he would not sell a single ticket. "If the people won't come and see my acting," he said, "it shan't be said they come by Mr. Buller's desire." At this time Fortune seemed to close every door against him; he wrote to Dublin, to Edinburgh, but received no answers; he wrote to Kemble, offering to engage with him for a third-rate line of business, still no reply; he opened an academy to teach dancing and fencing, no pupils came to him.

Now came what seemed to be a stroke of luck,

but which afterwards proved a disaster that once threatened to mar his fortunes. He had been in correspondence with Elliston concerning an engagement at the new theatre in Drury Lane, and at length closed with his offer of a salary of three pounds a week, but he could not get any definite time fixed for opening. By-and-by Elliston seemed inclined to depart from the stipulations of the agreement, and so the affair remained uncertain. In the meantime, while Kean was at Teignmouth, Doctor Drury, once head-master of Harrow, saw him act on his benefit night. When Mrs. Drury came next day to pay for her box, she said how highly gratified both herself and her husband had been with the performance, and, better still, that the Doctor would, on the following day dine in company with Mr. Pascoe Greenfell, one of the committee of Drury Lane, and would try to get him an engagement at that theatre. In due time arrived a letter requesting him to come up to London immediately. As usual, he had no funds; all depended upon his benefit, and to obtain that he must play out his engagement. And so he had to journey from Teignmouth to Barnstaple, thence to Weymouth and Dorchester, suffering all the tortures of hope deferred.

At Weymouth he was requested for the third time to play seconds to Master Betty, and for the third time ran away. He was absent for a couple

of days. When the Phenomenon had departed, Kean was found in front of the theatre stalking up and down in tragic fury, his hands in his pockets, cursing managers, plays and fortune. After some persuasion he was enticed home, where he burst into a passion of tears and recovered. "I must feel deeply; he commands overflowing houses, I play to empty benches, and I know my powers are superior to his," was his answer to some remonstrances addressed to him.

One night, in the autumn of the year 1813, while performing in Dorchester: "The curtain drew up," to quote the actor's own words, "I saw a wretched house: a few people in the pit and gallery, and three persons in the boxes showed the quality of the attraction we possessed. In the stage box, however, there was a gentleman who appeared to understand acting—he was very attentive to the performance. Seeing this, I was determined to play my best." (His part was Octavian in Colman's "Mountaineers.") "The strange man did not applaud, but his looks told me he was pleased. After the play I went to my dressing-room to change my dress for the Savage (a pantomime character) so that I could hear every word that was said overhead. I heard the gentleman ask Lee, the manager, the name of the performer who played Octavian. 'Oh,' replied Lee, 'his name is Kean; a wonderful clever fellow.' 'He is certainly very

clever, but he is very small,' said the gentleman. 'His mind is large, no matter for his height,' answered Lee. By this time I was dressed; I therefore mounted to the stage. The gentleman bowed to me and complimented me slightly upon my playing. 'Well,' he said, 'will you breakfast with me to-morrow; I shall be glad to have some conversation with you. My name is Arnold; I AM THE MANAGER OF DRURY LANE THEATRE.' I staggered as if I had been shot."

As soon as the performance was over and he could tear off his dress, he rushed home. Agitation would scarcely allow him to speak. "My fortune's made, my fortune's made," he gasped at last. Then told the good news. But as he finished, his eyes fell upon his poor sickly first-born, then very ill. "Let but Howard live, and we shall be happy yet," he exclaimed, hopefully. Alas, the proceeds of his benefit in that very town had to be devoted to the poor boy's burial.

The result of the appointment with Arnold was a three-years' engagement at Drury Lane, at eight, nine, and ten pounds per week. A few days afterwards Howard died. "The joy I felt," he wrote to Arnold, "three days since at the flattering prospects of future prosperity is now obliterated by the unexpected loss of my child."

At last, on the 6th of November, he contrived to get to town. His salary was to commence at once,

but when he went to the treasury he encountered a sudden and unexpected rebuff. Elliston had put in his prior claim, and Arnold very angrily asserted that he had engaged himself under false pretences. Kean wrote a letter detailing every point of his transactions with the manager of the Wych Street Theatre, in which he endeavoured to show that that gentleman had justly forfeited all claim to his services, by having been the first to violate the terms of the agreement. I have not space to enter into the merits of the dispute; Elliston had evidently acted very shiftily towards the poor unknown actor, taking advantage of his position, and Kean, upon the prospect of the better engagement opening to him, had done everything in his power to break with him. It may be averred that neither party acted in strict honour. The new year came, more than one actor had made his *début* at Drury Lane and failed. The tragedy portion of the company was less than mediocre, being represented by such conventional actors as Raymond, Pope, Johnstone, Henry Siddons, and Rae. The fortunes of the theatre were in a desperate condition, the expenses far exceeding the receipts, and inevitable bankruptcy looming in the no distant future. At length the dispute between Elliston and Kean was adjusted, by the former taking an actor named Bernard as a substitute, the extra amount of his salary, two pounds a week, having to be paid by Kean. From

the end of November to the end of the following January, Kean existed, heaven alone knows how, for the management of Drury Lane refused to pay him a shilling. In Miss Mellon's Memoirs, it is asserted that she, having heard of his distress, secretly assisted him, and assured his landlady of her rent. All that he had ever suffered could not have equalled the misery of those two months of oscillation between hope and despair, amidst hunger and wretchedness. Arnold now, as a *pis aller*, made up his mind to give him a trial. But the troubles were not yet over. Now rose a dispute as to the opening part; Arnold wanted Richard, but Kean knew the disadvantage his small figure would be at, when compared with that of the majestic Kemble, and answered, "Shylock or nothing."\* There was marvellous resoluteness in this determination, considering all he had passed through, which had been sufficient to crush the strongest spirit. But it succeeded, and the 26th of January, 1814, was decided upon for his appearance. One rehearsal only was vouchsafed him, and that was hurried and careless. The actors sneered at his figure, at his shabby coat with the capes, made of rough grey cloth, such as

\* His desire, however, when he first came to town had been to open in Knowles' play of "Leo the Gipsy," which has been mentioned a page or two back. And he certainly would have used every effort to have done so, but, fortunately for him, the MS. was lost and no copy was extant.

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is used for soldier's clothing; Raymond declared "his business" would not do, and prophesied certain failure. One *lady* wondered where the little wretch had been picked up! and advised him to return to the country, as amongst such actors as he was surrounded by, he could stand no chance. He went home. "I must dine to-day," he said; and for the first time for many days indulged in the luxury of meat. Then all that he had to do was to wait as patiently as he could for the night. "My God!" he exclaimed, "if I succeed I shall go mad!" Terrible prophecy. Volumes could not better describe the agitation of his mind.

## CHAPTER II.

EDMUND KEAN : HIS GREAT DAYS.

The Dark Hour before the Dawn—A Delirious Triumph—Richard and Hamlet—His Wonderful Acting in Othello—His Iago—Fame and Fortune—Paying off old Insults—The Delirium of Success—Romeo—Zanga—Dr. Doran's Picture of his Sir Giles Overreach—Bertram—A Danaë Shower—His Love of Low Company—An Escapade—The Contest with Booth—A Wonderful Performance—Mistakes—His Lear—A Profound Student—First Visit to America—His Contest with Young—His Professional Jealousy.

AS the church clocks were striking six he sallied forth from his lodgings in Cecil Street. His parting words to his wife were, "I wish I was going to be shot!" In his hand he carried a small bundle—containing shoes, stockings, wig, and other trifles of costume. The night was very cold and foggy; there had been heavy snow, and a thaw had set in; the streets were almost impassable with slush, which penetrated through his worn boots and chilled him to the bone. He darted quickly through the stage-door, wishing to escape all notice, and repaired to his dressing-room. There the feel-

fect

ings of the actors were shocked by another innovation; he was actually going to play Shylock in a black wig instead of the traditional red one! They smiled among themselves, shrugged their shoulders, but made no remark; such a man was beyond remonstrance—besides, what did it matter? he would not be allowed to appear a second time. Jack Bannister and Oxberry were the only ones who offered him a friendly word. When the curtain rose the house was miserably bad, but by-and-by the overflow of Covent Garden, which was doing well at that time, began to drop in and make up a tolerable audience. His reception was encouraging. At his first words, “Three thousand ducats, well!” Dr. Drury, who was in front, pronounced him “safe.” At “*I will* be assured I may,” there was a burst of applause, and at the great speech ending with, “And for these courtesies I’ll lend you thus much monies,” the sounds of approbation were very strong. Even as the curtain fell upon the first act success was almost ensured, and already the actors who had treated him so superciliously, began to gather round with congratulations. But he shrank from them, and wandered about in the darkness at the back of the stage. The promise of the first act was well-sustained in the second. But his great triumph was reserved for the scene with Salanio and Salarino in the third, where he is told of the flight of his daughter Jessica

played  
character of  
Shylock

with a Christian ; there so terrible was his energy, so magnificent his acting, that a whirlwind of applause shook the house. Then came the trial scene, grander still in its complex emotions and its larger scope for great powers ; and all was so novel, so strange, so opposed to old traditions. When the curtain finally fell upon the wild enthusiasm of the audience, the stage manager, Raymond, who had snubbed him, offered him oranges ; Arnold, who had bullied him and “ young man’d ” him brought him negus. Drunk with delight he rushed home, and with half-frenzied incoherency poured forth the story of his triumph. “ Mary,” he cried, “ you shall ride in your carriage yet ! Charles,” lifting the child from his bed, “ shall go to Eton.” Then his voice faltered, and he murmured, “ If Howard had but lived to see it.”

The “ Merchant of Venice ” was played several nights in succession, and the nightly receipts rose from one hundred to six hundred. His next part was Richard—the *second* part is always the touchstone of an actor’s success ; he here entered the lists with Cooke and Kemble, and memories of Garrick’s splendid performance had not yet died out among old playgoers. In Shylock his small stature mattered little, but in Richard that disadvantage would be glaringly perceptible ; he approached the part with fear and trembling. “ I am so frightened,” he said before the curtain rose,

*Cibber's*  
"that my acting will be almost dumb show to-night." But nevertheless from the first soliloquy to the appalling last scene, he took both audience and critics by storm. The performance must have been wonderfully like Garrick's. As a child we hear of him reciting the part "after the manner of Garrick," of which doubtless Miss Tidswell gave him the idea. Mrs. Garrick, who went to see him play it, told Dibdin that Cooke put her in mind of her husband, but Kean was like Mr. Garrick himself. His chief fault was that his hypocrisy, in the scene with Lady Anne, was too thinly veiled. There was an exultant reckless scorn in his insinuating gallantry that could not have deceived the shallowest woman. But the tent scene was wonderful, and in the last Hazlitt says, "he fought like one drunk with wounds; and the attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword is taken from him, had a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be disarmed, and the very phantoms of his despair had a withering power."

Cooke was said to have been far surpassed. But Macready makes a very clever distinction between the performance of the two actors. He says that "there was a solidity of deportment and manner, and at the same time a sort of unctuous enjoyment of his successful craft, in the soliloquising stage villainy of Cooke, which gave powerful and rich

effect to the sneers and retorts of Cibber's hero, and certain points traditional from Garrick were made with consummate skill, significance, and power. Kean's conception was decidedly more Shakespearian. He hurried you along in his impetuous course, with a spirit that brooked no delay. In inflexibility of will and sudden grasp of expedients he suggested the idea of a feudal Napoleon. His personation was throughout consistent, and he was only inferior to Cooke where he attempted points upon the same ground as his distinguished predecessor." Byron wrote in his Diary: "Just returned from seeing Kean in Richard. By Jove, he is a soul! Life, nature, truth, without exaggeration or diminution." The terrible excitement of the first representation laid him up for a week. On the day of his second appearance in the part, the doors of the theatre were besieged soon after noon, and at night hundreds were unable to gain admittance.

His next character was Hamlet. It had always been his favourite one, and that to which he had given the greatest study. We can scarcely reconcile our ideas of Kean with that of the Prince of Denmark. Yet Hazlitt says he formed a higher conception of his genius from that than even from his two previous delineations. It was full of beauties, more especially in the closet scene, and that with Ophelia, in both of which his passion was tempered with a gentleness never seen before. His

See  
Hutchinson's

returning to press Ophelia's hand to his lips 'ere he left, was, says the great critic, "the finest commentary that was ever made on Shakespeare." Othello and Iago, played alternately, were his next parts.

"In the tender scene of Othello," says Dr. Doran, "(where love for Desdemona was above all other passion, even when for love he jealously slew her), he had as much power over his 'bad voice,' as his adversaries called it, as John Kemble over his asthmatic cough, and attuned it to the tenderness to which he had to give expression. In the fiercer scenes he was unsurpassable, and in the great third act none who remember him will, I think, be prepared to allow that he ever had, or is likely to have, an equal." His farewell "struck on the heart and imagination," says Hazlitt, "like the swelling of some divine music."

His Iago was quite original; he entirely discarded the old conventional villain of the stage, and played him lightly and naturally: at times it even lacked a necessary weightiness. "The accomplished hypocrite," to again quote Hazlitt, "was, perhaps, never so finely, so adroitly portrayed—a gay, light-hearted monster—a careless, cordial, comfortable villain." "Was not Iago perfection," writes Byron to Moore, "particularly the last look? I was *close* to him (in the orchestra), and never saw an English countenance half so expressive."

When the season closed, he had played Shylock fifteen times, Richard twenty-five, Hamlet eight, Othello ten, Iago eight, and Luke in "Riches," (Massinger's "City Madam" altered) four. Of those seventy nights the profits were £20,000. On one of the Othello nights the receipts had amounted to over £673. Previously there had been one hundred and thirty-nine nights of continuous loss. Nor were the shareholders ungrateful to him. After his third appearance, Whitbread tore up the original agreement for eight pounds per week, and gave him another for twenty. After his first performance of Richard, Coutts, the banker, presented him with a hundred guineas and a gold watch. Similar presents were made by noblemen, and four of the shareholders presented him with a share each. One week the Committee presented him with one hundred pounds, the next with five hundred.

Raymond, the stage-manager, who had so contemptuously prophesied failure at his first rehearsal, was now always fawning upon him. But Kean could not forgive his former behaviour, at a time when a word of encouragement would have been so precious to him, and at length rid himself of this fulsome flatterer in a most summary and extraordinary fashion. One night, after Othello, he ordered a bowl of punch to be brought to his dressing-room, and sent for Raymond to partake of it. The stage-manager came all bows and smiles,

as usual. Kean stopped him in the middle of an extravagant compliment: "Look you, sir, now I'm drawing money to your treasury, you find out I am a fine actor. You told me when I rehearsed Shylock it would be a failure. Then I was a poor man, without a friend, and you did your best to keep me down. Now you smother me with compliments; 'tis right I should make some return; there, sir, to the devil with your fine speeches, take that," and over the head and breast of the manager went the contents of the bowl. After which Kean stripped, and offered to give him satisfaction in a round at fisticuffs, which the other emphatically declined.

Some of the actors sneered at his success, and called him "the fortunate actor." "I hear he is a very excellent Harlequin," remarked one. "I am very sure he is, for he has jumped over all our heads," replied good-natured Jack Bannister. Dowton protested he could play Shylock better; tried it some time afterwards, and did not repeat the experiment.

Upon the close of the Drury Lane season, Kean went over to Dublin. In twelve nights he realized £1,370. He was invited to the table of Grattan, and of all the celebrities of the Irish capital. He committed some extraordinary freaks, under the influence of the national beverage; was captured by watchmen; broke out of the watch-house, and

played at hare-and-hounds through the streets in the early morning. From Dublin to Bristol and Birmingham with equal success—and equal riot. From Birmingham he started for London at eight o'clock one morning, after a whole night spent in conviviality; mounted on the box, beside his servant, his loaded pistols, *muzzles upwards*, tied to the button-holes of his coat. He was at this time residing in Cecil Street, Strand.

The first of his new characters in the second season was Macbeth, but it never became one of his finest efforts; the exquisite, poetical speeches of the last act were rendered ineffectively; the whole performance lacked repose, and was too much like his Richard. Romeo followed; it was against his wish, for he disliked the part; never was anything more leaden or unloverlike than his balcony scene, but he redeemed himself somewhat in that with the Friar. In Penruddock he foolishly tilted against John Kemble in one of his grandest impersonations, and failed; nor was he more fortunate in Richard the Second, although Macready says his elocution was never more masterly than in the third act of that play.

His great success of this season was Zanga. Procter, in the notes to his "Life of Kean," says that a gentleman, who was standing among the crowd in the pit-passage, unable to make his way further, heard a tremendous shout of applause within. He

asked if Zanga had not just previously cried, "Then lose her!" for that phrase uttered by Kean in the country used to make the walls shake; and he was answered that it was so. Southey and a friend went to see him in this play. When Zanga, having consummated his vengeance, and uttering the words, "Know, then, 'twas I!" raised his arms over the fainting Alonzo, his attitude and the expression of his features were so terrible, so appalling, that Southey exclaimed, "He looks like Michael Angelo's rebellious arch-angel!" "He looks like the arch-fiend himself," said the other.

Next came Sir Giles Overreach, the most wonderful of all his impersonations. During the last scene ladies were carried out of the boxes in screaming hysterics; Lord Byron fell into a convulsive fit; and, yet more wonderful instance of his marvellous power, a well-seasoned actress like Mrs. Glover, who played Lady Allworth, fainted away. "The last act of Mr. Kean's performance of Sir Giles Overreach," says a writer in "Blackwood," "is, without doubt, the most terrific exhibition of human passion that has been witnessed on the modern stage. When his plans are frustrated, and his plots laid open, all the restraints of society are thrown aside at once, and a torrent of hatred and revenge bursts from his breaking heart like water from a cleft rock, or like a raging and devouring fire, that, while it consumes the body and soul on which it

feeds, darts forth its tongue of flame in all directions, threatening destruction to all within its reach. The whole of the last act exhibits a vehemence and rapidity, both of conception and execution, that perhaps cannot be surpassed."

Of his rendering of one of the passages of the last act, Dr. Doran, in "Their Majesties' Servants," has given us the following exquisite piece of word-painting.

"In this last character all the qualities of Kean's voice came out to wonderful purpose, especially in the scene where Lovel asks him :

" ' Are you not moved with the sad imprecations  
And curses of whole families, made wretched  
By your sinister practices !'

"To which Sir Giles replies :—

" ' Yes ! as rocks are,  
When foamy billows split themselves against  
Their flinty ribs ; or as the moon is mov'd  
When wolves, with hunger pin'd, howl at her brightness.'

"I seem still to hear the words and the voice as I pen this passage ; now composed, now grand as the foamy billows ; so flute-like on the word ' moon,' creating a scene with the sound, and anon sharp, harsh, fierce in the last line, with a look upward from those matchless eyes, that rendered the troop visible, and their howl perceptible to the ear ; the whole serenity of the man, and the solidity of his temper, being less illustrated by the assurance

in the succeeding words than by the exquisite music in the tone with which he uttered the word 'brightness.' "

Kemble attempted this part after him and failed most ignominiously.

Maturin's "Bertram," a gloomy but powerful play, and Sir Edward Mortimer, in "The Iron Chest," may be added to his list of successes. In the former part, one of his finest points was his "God bless the child," addressed to Imogen's infant, delivered with all the intense feeling he had so often expressed when looking upon his own sleeping child after he returned from his labours at night. Of his splendid acting in Sir Edward Mortimer, and in "Oronooko," a masterly description may be found in Macready's *Reminiscences*.

He was now in the very height of his fame, the lion of the day ; all the greatest men, poets, statesmen, nobles crowded his dressing-room, and were eager to secure him for their guest. Fortune poured down upon him a Danaë shower ; and we have pictures of young Charles playing with heaps of guineas, and bank-notes littering the drawing-room like waste paper. But he evaded the invitations of his aristocratic friends as much as possible. "I can act a character without fear of committing myself," he would say, "but I can't sit down at a lord's table with comfort, when they expect every word that comes out of my mouth to be wonderful."

He was painfully conscious of the defects of his education,\* and of his ignorance of the manners of good society ; to commit a solecism in good breeding was exquisite pain to him ; thus the apprehension of doing so kept him in a state of extreme discomfort. Whitbread said to Mrs. Kean once : “ We do not invite him because it seems so painful to him.” Once, after dining with Lord Byron, he suddenly disappeared to finish the evening at Tom Cribb’s : his destination being suspected, the noble poet went thither and found him drinking gin with some members of the “fancy,” and damning all lords. Byron broke off all friendship with him after that, until he saw him play Sir Giles.

A certain Countess once requested him to recite at her house, for the entertainment of the Duke of Wellington, whose numerous engagements prevented him visiting the theatres, but he refused. “ I am asked by these people,” he replied to some one who was remonstrating with him upon the subject, “ not as an equal, not as a gentleman, scarcely as a man of talent, but as a wild beast to be stared at.” This was the arrogance of ill-breeding. ? Yet he could conduct himself in society as a gentleman. Ma-

\* During his strolling days he bought a Latin dictionary and learned a number of words and phrases by heart, which he was very fond of quoting on every possible occasion, sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly. It was probably this love for and use of quotations which first gave rise to the assertion, repeated by some of his biographers, that he had been educated at Eton.

cready, who passed an evening with him, after his first success, speaks admiringly of "the mild and modest expression of his Italian features, and his unassuming manner,\* which I may, perhaps, justly describe as partaking in some degree of shyness." He was very sparing of words until the glass had circulated pretty freely, then he became animated, fluent and communicative, sang with "a touching grace," gave anecdotes and imitations that "equalled the best display Mathews ever made, and almost convulsed us with laughter." But, alas, he had an inherent love of low company and an overweening vanity that could not endure a sense of inferiority to anyone; among his tavern companions, he was a king, and that was the only position acceptable to him. He would at times indulge in the wildest frolics, mount on horseback after the performance, and ride away into the country at such a pace, leaping gates and hedges, that a belated wayfarer might have taken him for the foul fiend himself; at others, the streets of London and lowest purlieus of St. Giles's were the scenes of his extravagances. Unlike Cooke, however, we hear of his disappointing the audience only once. It was on the second performance of a revival of Massinger's "Duke of Milan," which proved a failure. When the time came for rising

\* Crabb Robinson remarks that "from the gentleness of his manner, no one would anticipate the actor who excels in such bursts of passion."

the curtain, Kean was not in the theatre, and was not anywhere to be found. After a night's debauch he had started in the morning for Greenwich, that was all they could learn, and another play had to be substituted. The next day he was found in Greenwich, helplessly intoxicated, in a low public-house. The friends who discovered him called in a doctor, had him bandaged up, and carefully conveyed home; the report given out was that he had dislocated his shoulder. He did not re-appear until three nights afterwards.

Rivals began to spring up. Cobham, a howling, mouthing creature, who afterwards became a god at the Coburg, entered the field against him, to retire with ignominy. But a more celebrated contest was that with Junius Booth, the father of President Lincoln's assassin, who had appeared at Covent Garden as Richard, which he played in exact imitation of Kean, and was pronounced by a few equal, if not superior to the master. To settle the question the Drury Lane management brought him over to that theatre. The trial-play was to be Othello, Kean the Moor, Booth the Iago. The house was crowded—the excitement prodigious. “Booth,” says Barry Cornwall, “at first seemed to shrink from the combat. He eventually, however, overcame his fear, and went through the part of Iago manfully. But Kean!—no sooner did the interest of the story begin, and the passion of the part

Cobham  
Booth  
W. S. L.  
W. S. L.

Othello

justify his fervour, than he seemed to *expand* from the small quick resolute figure which had previously been moving about the stage, and to assume the vigour and dimensions of a giant. He glared down upon the now diminutive Iago ; he seized and tossed him aside, with frightful and irresistible vehemence. Till then we had seen Othello and Iago, as it were together : now the Moor seemed to occupy the stage alone. Up and down, to and fro, he went, pacing about like the chased lion who has received his fatal hurt, but whose strength is still undiminished. The fury and whirlwind of the passions seemed to have endowed him with supernatural strength. His eye was glittering and bloodshot, his veins were swollen, and his whole figure restless and violent. It seemed dangerous to cross his path, and death to assault him. There is no doubt but that Kean was excited on this occasion in a most extraordinary degree, as much as though he had been maddened by wine. The impression which he made upon the audience has, perhaps, never been equalled in theatrical annals. Even the actors, hardened in their art, were moved. One comedian, a veteran of forty years standing, told us that when Kean rushed off the stage in the third act, he (our narrator) felt all his face deluged with tears—‘ a thing, I give you my word, sir, that has never happened to me, since I was a crack, thus high.’ ”

Booth’s defeat was complete. He would not act

with Kean the second night, although announced to do so in the bills; he returned to Covent Garden, where the public crowded to hiss him for breaking his engagement. It was alleged that these disturbances were organized by "the Wolves," (an actor's club, of which Kean was a principal member, held at the "Coal Hole,") but if it were so the public went with them.

Kean lacked the admirable judgment of Garrick, which prevented the latter appearing in characters that did not suit him; he made but two mistakes, Romeo and Othello, but he did not persevere in them, and frequently after weeks of study would cast aside a part for a mere doubt of its suitability to his powers. Kean, more vain than judicious, rushed at everything—tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce. He appeared as Abel Drugger, as Tom Tug, and sang the songs very sweetly, and once as harlequin in a farce. He was the hero of Miss Porter's "Switzerland," of Bucke's "Italian," and other monuments of portentous dulness. With the remembrance of John Kemble's magnificent performance fresh in every memory, he played Coriolanus. His Brutus in Howard Payne's "Fall of Tarquin" was a fine piece of acting. "We can recollect no instance," writes a critic in the *Times*, "of an actor who could stand silently on the stage for minutes together, and, by calling up in succession all the shades and degrees of passion into his countenance,

Real

move his audience to silence and tears of true sympathy." Lear was the last of his grand triumphs. The full beauty of his conception, however, was not revealed to the audience until several seasons later, when he rejected Tate's happy ending and restored Shakespeare's terrible catastrophe. "They cannot tell what I can do until they see me with Cordelia dead in my arms," he used to say, and the effect he produced in the last act was very great. Macready, however, perhaps because it was one of his own favourite parts, was not greatly impressed by the performance. Before he attempted the part, it is said he made several visits to St. Luke's and Bethlehem hospitals, to study the manifestations of insanity. This brings me to the consideration of that erroneous idea, still entertained by some people, that Kean was purely an unstudied and impulsive actor. An impulsive actor he was, and some of his grandest effects were flashes of inspiration;\* but unstudied he was not. On the contrary, he studied intensely. A contemporary writing of his strolling days, says, "He used to mope about for hours, walking for miles and miles alone with his hands in his pockets, thinking intensely on his characters. No one could get a word from him; he studied and slaved beyond any actor I ever knew."

\* Coleridge said his acting was reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning.

Mr's  
reaching!

Nor did he relax his labours even when he had reached the highest pinnacle of his fame.

“Kean did not,” says Barry Cornwall, “as some persons have conjectured, play at hazard. He did not throw himself passionately into his part, and trust to the impulse of the moment for success. He studied it long and anxiously; often during half the night. However occupied in the evening, whether in acting or otherwise, he would frequently begin to study when his family retired to rest, and convert his drawing-room into a stage. Here (with a dozen candles, some on the floor, some on the table, and some on the chimney-piece and some near the pier-glass), he would act scene after scene; considering the emphasis, the modulation of the verse, and the fluctuations of the character, with the greatest care. In the morning, he would perhaps rehearse a scene or two, exhibit some of his fine “effects” before his wife, and conclude by inquiring, “Do you think that will do?” And if she answered, as was generally the case, “Oh, it’s beautiful!” he would go away content. Yet he would, after all, frequently reject these same effects when he played the character in public; and, upon being asked his reason for so doing, reply, “I felt that what I did was right. Before, I was only rehearsing.” Probably no actor, except Garrick, ever had so great a natural genius for the stage as

Kean, but had he not bestowed upon it the most perfect cultivation, he would never have been the consummate artiste he was.

In 1820, he paid his first visit to America. In New York as much as eighteen dollars were paid for *the choice* of a box to hold nine persons. He reaped a golden harvest by his tour, and returned to Drury Lane for the following season. He appeared as Hastings, Sir Pertinax Macsycophant, Wolsey, Don Felix, none of them good performances. In Miss Baillie's "De Montfort," however, he scored a success.

In 1822, the Drury Lane management brought Young from Covent Garden. The announcement that the two tragedians were to appear together as Othello and Iago created an immense excitement; places were secured six weeks in advance. Here were the representatives of the two opposing schools—the classic and romantic, into which the theatrical world was divided—brought face to face, thus affording a fine opportunity for impartial judgment upon their several merits.

"Since Quin and Garrick, or Garrick or Barry," says Dr. Doran, "no conjunction of great names moved the theatrical world like this. Both men put out all their powers, and the public profited by the magnificent display. Kean and Young acted together—Othello and Iago, Lothaire and Guiscard, Jaffier and Pierre, Alexander and Clytus, Posthumus

and Iachimo, eliciting enthusiasm by all, but none so much as by Othello and Iago."

The "Examiner" critic writing of this performance, characterises Kean's acting as infinitely surpassing all his former efforts :

"How shall we convey," he says, "an idea of these performances to those who were not present at them, and who will, we greatly fear, never have another opportunity of seeing such ? For it is not in human nature to reach the pitch of excellence attained by Mr. Kean on the two occasions, without some extraordinary, involuntary stimulus, or sustain itself there for any length of time even with that stimulus."

What a contrast there must have been between the chiselled face, fine figure and sonorous voice of Young, and the gipsy features, small stature and hoarse tones of his rival. But one flash of those marvellous eyes would thrill an audience more than all the stately finished elocution of the Kemble School.

It had been arranged that they should alternate these two parts, but after playing Iago to Young's Othello, Kean refused to comply with this condition : "I will rather throw up my engagement," he said, "and you may seek your redress in the law courts. I had never seen Young act. Everyone has told me he could not hold a farthing rushlight to me, but he can ! He is an actor, and though I flatter

myself he could not act Othello as I, yet what chance should I have in Iago after him with his d—— musical voice. I tell you what: Young is not only an actor, such as I did not dream him to be, but he is a gentleman. Go to him, tell him then from me that if he will allow me to keep Othello and Jaffier I shall esteem it a personal obligation. Tell him he has made as great a hit in Iago as ever I did in Othello."

But Kean could never reconcile himself to a rival, and he was particularly irritable against Young. "How much longer am I to play with that Jesuit?" he demanded of the managers.\*

\* So excessive was his jealousy that even the applause won by a foreign actor was insupportable to him. While at Paris, he went to see Talma in Orestes. The ovation was tremendous; Kean was of course loud in his praises. "Ah," replied Talma, "if you are so pleased with Orestes, you must see me to-morrow night in Cinna; that is a far finer performance." When they returned home, Mrs. Kean was enthusiastic about the great French tragedian. The next morning her husband quitted Paris; he could not endure to witness such a second triumph.

## CHAPTER III.

### EDMUND KEAN—HIS FALL.

His First Introduction to Mrs. Cox—The Trial—A Death Blow—Second Visit to America—The Boston Riot—His Re-appearance in London—Charles Kean's First Appearance—Edmund in "Ben Nazir"—The Wreck of Genius—William Beverley—Brave to the Last—His Last Moments—His Death.—His Burial—Dr. Doran's Eulogy.

WE now approach the saddest portion of this sad story, for, in spite of the dazzling brilliance of a few of its epochs, it is wholly sad; yet even the struggles and miseries of his earlier years are less melancholy to contemplate than the waste of magnificent opportunities which disgrace the period of his high fortunes; for in the first we could still hope for better things, but in the last we can only anticipate worse.

While he was playing at Taunton in 1818, a lady was observed to faint away in a stage-box: no uncommon occurrence, as we have seen. She was conveyed into the green-room, and Kean showed her great attention. She proved to be the wife of a London Alderman, named Cox, who was staying

in the town for a time. Kean was invited to their hotel, and afterwards to their house in London. This was the commencement of an unhappy intimacy. It would appear that the lady's conduct had not previously been quite immaculate; that the passion began, at least, on her side, and, if Kean was not a Joseph, she was something of a Mrs. Potiphar. The husband was strangely blind, allowed her to visit the actor in his dressing-room; and, when he was bankrupt, accepted money for his necessities supplied by Kean. By-and-by, through some strange negligence, a packet of letters was found; an action for crim. con. commenced, and full damages were awarded the injured (?) husband. The press denounced Kean in the most ferocious terms, and called upon the public to drive him from the stage. The public, with that love of hunting down any one or any thing in misfortune, which is the inherent cruelty of human nature, was not slow to respond to the appeal. The audience that once hung breathlessly upon his lips, and greeted him with shouts of acclamation, now howled and hissed, and would not hear him. Dauntless as ever, he gave them scorn for scorn, insult for insult, as daringly as ever he did the poor yokels who offended him in his strolling days. But such a contest could not but terminate in his own discomfiture; his friends and patrons fell from him, his wife and child left him. In the provinces he was received with

the same disapprobation, everywhere except at Dublin, the people of which retained a grateful remembrance of his having given up a night's receipts to the relief of the starving Irish peasantry, and accorded him a hearty welcome. It was the death-blow to his fame and his life. Barry Cornwall presents us with a melancholy picture of him at this period :—

“ I called on him in London soon after the business ” (the trial) “ had subsided, and when he was on the point of his exile to America. I never saw a man so changed ; he had all the air of desperation about him. He looked bloated with rage and brandy ; his nose was red, his cheeks blotched, his eyes bloodshot ; I really pitied him. He had lodgings in Regent Street ; but I believe very few of his former friends, of any respectability, now noticed him. The day I saw him he sat down to the piano, notwithstanding the agitated state of his mind, and sang for me ‘ Lord Ullin’s Daughter,’ with a depth, and power, and sweetness that quite electrified me. I had not heard him sing for many years ; his improvement was almost incredible ; his accompaniment was also far superior to his former style of playing. I could not repress a deep sentiment of sorrow at the wreck he presented, of genius, fame, and wealth. At this period, I believe, he had not one hundred pounds left of the many thousands he had received. His mind seemed shattered ; he was

an outcast on the world. He left England a few days afterwards, and I never dreamt of seeing him again."

It is a moot point whether the public have any right to constitute themselves the executioners of social judgments in such cases as these. Were an actor destitute of every merit, save the private virtues, to appeal to them for support on those grounds alone, would they pay one sixpence to see him? An unimpeachable character, combined with great abilities, will undoubtedly add to a man's chances of success, but it will do nothing towards creating them. It is not Mr. Garrick, or Mr. Kemble, or Mr. Kean the public flocked to see, but their wonderful powers of transforming themselves into beings of an imaginary world. Upon the stage, the individuality of the actor is absorbed in the poet's creation, and it was not Kean they hissed, but Othello and Sir Giles. When he came into society it was another thing; then he was a personage who had outraged its laws, and it had a right to cast him out. Again, those who could not make the nice distinction between the actor and the man were perfectly right in withdrawing themselves from the performance; but for a brutal mob—for a concourse of people, of whatever position of life they may be, is, under such circumstances, worthy of no better name—for a brutal mob, I repeat, the greater portion of which was, no doubt, stained with the

very vices they so clamorously condemned, to treat a man of genius as they treated Kean, is unjustifiable upon any grounds whatever.

In America another storm burst upon him. During his former trip he had made two visits to Boston; the first was highly successful; the second, being out of the season, was a failure: one night, there being only about twenty people in the house, he refused to play, and left the town; the dignity of the Bostonians was outraged, and, upon his return, they resolved to take vengeance for what they were pleased to consider an affront. His appearance upon the stage was the signal for a terrible riot; missiles of all kinds, bottles, and brass balls procured for the occasion, were hurled at him; he had to fly for his life; then the mob invaded the stage, sought for him in the dressing-rooms, and, not finding him there, surrounded the hotel at which he was staying, demanding him to be given up, and openly declaring their intention of killing him. It was with much difficulty he succeeded in effecting his escape.

While in Canada, some chiefs of the Hurons, who visited the theatre, were so much struck by his performance, that they made him a chief of their tribe. He was delighted, declared that not even Drury Lane had conferred so high a distinction upon him, and seriously debated with himself whether he should not spend the remainder of his days with

these children of the forest. At length he returned to England.

“I shall not soon forget,” to again quote Dr. Doran, “that January night of 1827, on which he reappeared at Drury Lane in Shylock. A rush so fearful, an audience so packed, and a reconciliation so complete, acting so faultless, and a dramatic enjoyment so exquisite, I never experienced. Nothing was heeded, indeed the scenes were passed over, until Shylock was to appear, and I have heard no such shout since as that which greeted him. Fire, strength, beauty, every quality of the actor seemed to have acquired fresh life. It was all deceptive, however. The actor was all but extinguished after this convulsive, but seemingly natural, effect. He lay in bed at the Hummum’s hotel all day, amusing himself melancholily with his Indian gewgaws, and trying to find a healthy tonic in cognac.”

He had come back a wreck in mind, body, and fortune. Between 1814 and 1827 his earnings had amounted to £200,000, and yet in this last-named year he found himself without a hundred pounds in the world. He had lived extravagantly, rented a house in Clarges Street, May Fair, for which Mrs. Kean, who seems to have loved display and grand company, was more responsible than he. Kean was innocent of one vice—gambling; but he squandered his money with reckless profusion. While under the influence of drink, sharpers would in-

duce him to give them cheques for large amounts, which were always presented at the bank before he was awake the next morning. He gave a great deal away in charity, in helping old companions, for he never forgot a benefit any more than he did an insult or an injury. Those who had been kind to him in his poor days had no need to solicit, he was always too eager to proffer; even any little debt he might have left unpaid, was settled with magnificent interest.

Upon his return from America, Charles, who had just left Eton, where he had been an oppidan for three years, demanded that £300 for three years should be settled upon his mother. Kean would not or could not comply, upon which the boy, then little more than sixteen, threw up the Indian cadetship his father had procured him, and declared his intention of taking to the stage. To this Kean was bitterly averse, and they parted in anger. On October 1st, 1827, Charles made his first appearance upon any stage, at Drury Lane as Young Norval. The performance was very severely commented upon by the press, and, indeed, seems to have been cold and very much below mediocrity. The next year there was a reconciliation between father and son, and Kean appeared at Glasgow for Charles's benefit, as Brutus to his Titus. In 1828 he went over to Paris to play. But the French stage was still fettered by its classical tra-

ditions, and the Parisians could not appreciate his natural and impulsive style. A thin audience sat out Richard almost in silence, until the last act; but his marvellous death scene electrified even them into enthusiasm. After two or three performances he threw up the engagement in disgust.

After the great triumph of his opening night, the public soon perceived that only the wreck of their great actor had come back to them. Grattan's description of Kean's appearance soon afterwards in his play of "Ben Nazir," is a dark picture of failing powers. After describing his entrance, his splendid dress, and the thunders of applause that greeted him, he goes on to say:—"He spoke, but what a speech! The one I wrote consisted of eight or nine lines; *his* was of two or three *sentences*, but not six consecutive words of the text. His look, his manner, his tone, were to *me* quite appalling; to any other observer they must have been incomprehensible. He stood fixed, drawled out his incoherent words, and gave the notion of a man who had been half-hanged and then drawn through a horse-pond . . . . Kean went through it like a man in the last stage of exhaustion and decay. The act closed, a dead silence followed the fall of the curtain."

Yet still at times transient gleams of his old powers would burst forth with all the old electric fire, and audiences still crushed to suffocation to

see him. "To those," says Doran, "who saw him from the front, there was not a trace of weakening power in him. But oh, ye few who stood in between the wings, where a chair was placed for him, do you not remember the saddening spectacle of that wrecked genius ; a man in his very prime, with not merely the attributes of age about him, but with some of the infirmities of it, which are wont to try the heart of love itself. Have you forgotten that helpless, speechless, fainting mass bent up in that chair ; or the very unsavoury odour of the very brown, very hot, and very strong brandy and water, which alone kept alive the once noble Moor ? Aye, and still noble Moor : for when his time came, he looked about as from a dream, and sighed, and painfully got to his feet, swayed like a column, an earthquake, and in not more time than is required in telling it, was before the audience, as strong and as intellectually beautiful as of old ; but only happy in the applause which gave him a little breathing space, and saved him from falling dead upon the stage."

He appeared as Henry the Fifth, could not remember five consecutive lines of the text, and utterly collapsed towards the end. Some years previously he had purchased an estate in the Isle of Bute, and thither he frequently retired when his health was too shattered for him to act. But he had by this time become such a slave to intemper-

ance, that even when away from his haunts and associates he could not refrain from the poison that was destroying him body and mind.

Young William Beverley, now the celebrated artist, the son of his old Gloucester manager, was frequently with him at Bute. While the boy sketched at the window, Kean would sit at the piano and play and sing Moore's melodies, which he did with great taste and feeling. Once he said to his young guest, in whose presence he never committed those excesses which were fast completing the destruction of a constitution already irretrievably shattered, "If I could keep you always by my side, I might be saved yet."

But the magic of his name still wrought as a spell upon the public, and when in 1830 he announced a farewell performance at the King's Theatre, previous to a proposed third visit to America, which never took place, the crush at the doors was so terrible for hours, that strong men wedged in the living mass begged and implored to be allowed to pass out, unable to endure the pressure; women fainted and could not be dragged out, and many persons were seriously injured. Half-dying as he was, he went through a performance of unparalleled fatigue—the fourth act of Richard, the fourth of act Shylock, the fifth of Sir Giles, the second of Macbeth, and the third of Othello. In Macbeth only did his weakness overcome him, in

the other parts he was magnificent. It was his last revival, and he could not play for some time afterwards.

He had repeatedly refused to act with Macready, calling him contemptuously "a player;" but in November, 1832, he played Othello to his Iago for nine nights. It was the most formidable rivalry he had yet sustained. Macready was a finer actor than either Booth or Young, and Kean was not what he had been in those days. The contest was pretty equal. He now appeared occasionally, whenever his indomitable spirit, sustained by stimulants, could mount above the weakness of his body.

"Until four years ago," he said one night, holding a glass of brandy and water in his hand, "I could play Othello without this, now I can't do without it." During the last year of his life he went to live at Richmond, in a house next to the theatre, at which he acted sometimes. The old haughty courage that had faced the fury of a Drury audience, survived to the last. One night there was a row in the little theatre. "Go and tell them if they are not quiet within five minutes, I quit the house," he said to the manager; and the message delivered, he walked upon the stage in his private clothes and seated himself before the footlights watch in hand. Before the time had expired there was the quietude of death.

Thither came faithful Miss Tidswell to nurse him.

"I am no relation to him," she replied to the doctor's inquiries, "but I have known him from childhood, and it is hard to see him fading away in this the best part of his life!" and she burst into tears. We do not hear that he ever did anything for this old friend to whom he owed so much, save playing Don Felix for her farewell benefit in 1821, but she seems to have been comfortably off and perhaps did not need his assistance. Disreputable old Anne Carey too, had turned up again with "a dear brother" for Edmund and made her home in his house.

The 25th of March, 1833, was the end. For the first and the last time father and son stood upon the London stage together, Charles playing Iago to his father's Othello. The event caused a great excitement among playgoers; the house was crammed to suffocation. But Kean went through the part "dying as he went," until he came to the "Farewell," and the strangely appropriate words "Othello's occupation's gone." Then he gasped for breath, tried to commence the next speech, but fell upon his son's shoulder, moaning, "I am dying—speak to them for me!" And so the curtain descended upon him—for ever. He was conveyed to Richmond. "Come home to me; forget and forgive!" he wrote to his wife. And she came. An hour before he died, he sprang out of bed, exclaiming, "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!" and his last utterances were the dying words of Octavian,

*Dramatic*

“Farewell, Flo— Floranthe.” This was on the 15th of May, 1833.

His mother survived him only eight days. The doctor who attended him in his last illness remarked the wonderful likeness there was between the mother and son, which would seem to set at rest all doubts of her maternity. An application was made to the Dean of Westminster to forego the usual fees, and allow the body of the great actor to rest beside his predecessor and only peer, David Garrick. It was refused. So Edmund Kean had to be buried in the obscure little Richmond Church. More than a thousand people came to the house to look upon the coffin ere it was committed to its last resting-place. Sheridan Knowles, Macready, and many other members of the theatrical profession, together with some of the principal inhabitants of the town, attended the funeral, and nearly every shop was closed along the line of route.

Everything he left behind, all his presents and mementos, had to be sent to the hammer to pay his debts. Mrs. Kean did not die until 1849.

“Over the grave of one of the greatest of actors,” says Doran nobly, “something may be said in extenuation of his faults. Such curse as there can be in a mother’s indifference hung about him before his birth. A young Huron, of whose tribe he subsequently became a member, could not have lived a more savage, but certainly enjoyed a more comfort-

able and better tended, boyhood. Edmund Kean, from the very time of boyhood, had genius, industry, and ambition, but, with companionship enough to extinguish the first, lack of reward to dull the second, and repeated visitations of disappointment that might have warranted the exchange of high hopes for brutal despair,—he nourished his genius, maintained his industry, and kept an undying ambition, under circumstances when to do so was a part of heroism. . . . Kean was trained upon blows and curses, and starvation, and the charity of strangers. It was enough to make all his temper convert to fury, and any idea of such a young, unnurtured savage ever becoming the inheritor of the mantle worn by the great actors of old, would have seemed a madness even to that mother who soon followed him in death, Nancy Carey. But Edmund Kean cherished the idea warm in his bosom, never ceased to qualify himself for the attempt, studied for it while he starved, and when about to make it, felt and said that success would drive him mad. I believe it did, but whether or not, I can part from *the* great actor of my young days only with a tender respect. I do not forget the many hours of bright intellectual enjoyment for which I, in common with thousands, was indebted to him, and, in the contemplation of this actor's incomparable genius, I desire to forget the errors of the man."

## CHAPTER IV.

CHARLES MAYNE YOUNG.

A Royal Favourite—Household Troubles—An Amateur Actor—  
Julia Grimani—A Pathetic Story—First Appearance at the  
Haymarket—His Hamlet—Cassius—Engaged to Play with  
Kean—His Farewell Benefit—His Fine Character—His Eccen-  
tricities—As an Actor.

YOUNG was the worthiest of all the disciples of the Kemble School, and transmitted to a younger generation, which could not have seen the original, much of the excellence and of the shortcomings of John Philip's style. He was born in Fenchurch Street in 1777. His father was a surgeon. While yet a child, Charles went on a visit to his uncle, Dr. Müller, who was the court physician, at Copenhagen. There the King and Queen and Queen-Dowager became so fond of him, that they desired to keep him altogether. At parting, they presented him with a purse, which the Queen

had worked for him, filled with gold, a watch and a portrait that had been taken of him, the fellow of which was hung in the King's private cabinet. He commenced his education at Eton, but altered circumstances at home, through the dissipated habits of the head of the household, rendered his stay there brief, and he was removed to Merchant Taylors'. By-and-by the father's conduct rose to such a height of infamy, that the sons removed their mother from beneath the paternal roof, and Charles took her support upon himself.

His first entrance into life was as a merchant's clerk. It does not appear how he first came to entertain the idea of the stage; the only information to be gleaned upon the subject is that given in the "Memoirs" of Mathews, who relates that he met him as an amateur in some theatricals held in a loft over a stable, in Short's Gardens, Drury Lane. Young soon grew tired of the dull drudgery of office work, and in 1798, we find him making his *début* at Liverpool, under the name of Mr. Green, as Young Norval. He must have been at least tolerably successful, as the year afterwards he was engaged for the principal business at Manchester. Thence he migrated to Edinburgh, and at once established himself in so high a position, both histrionically and socially, that in 1802, we find him a guest at the table of Walter Scott, with whom he contracted an intimate and lasting friendship.

It was in 1804 that he first met the beautiful Julia Grimani, who afterwards became his wife. She appeared towards the close of the Haymarket season of 1804 as Juliet, and made so decided a success, that, her son informs us, the managers of all three theatres were anxious to secure her. She determined, however, to go into the provinces for a time, and appeared at Liverpool that same year. Charles Young was the leading man, the Romeo, Jaffier, Hamlet of the theatre. Very soon their stage-love became a reality, and early in the following year they were married. It was a deep and passionate love upon both sides. But their happiness was doomed to be short-lived. The lady died within fifteen months, after giving birth to her first child, now the Reverend Julian Young, his father's biographer.

Although he survived her fifty years, he never married again. His heart was buried with his dead love beneath that tree in the little Lancashire graveyard, and her memory remained green and beautiful to him through all that time. As he grew old, this feeling intensified. He would at times take her miniature from the recesses of a secret drawer, and, as he gazed upon it until the tears ran down his furrowed cheeks, he would deplore its unworthy presentment of her sweet face, and then he would produce from a cherished morocco case a long tress of chestnut hair. His very hopes of heaven were

interwoven with her image, and "Thank God! I shall soon see my Julia," were almost his last words. The innocent cause of this bereavement was christened Julian,\* a combination of his mother's names, Julia Ann. That mother's old friend, Lady Catherine Howard, the daughter of the Earl of Suffolk, offered to take the infant; but the father, wisely disapproving of the boy being reared in a sphere so much above his prospects in life, preferred confiding him to the care of another kind lady who made a similar proposal, the daughter of one Captain Forbes, an officer in the Royal Navy.

Thanks to the warm recommendation of his friend and old fellow amateur, Mathews, a correspondence was opened between him and George Colman. Young asked £20 a week and a benefit, to which the manager replied that such terms "much exceeded any bargain formed within my memory between a manager of the Haymarket Theatre and a performer coming to try his fortunes upon the London boards." "We propose, then," he says, in the last paragraph of his letter, "£14 a week and a benefit, you to take all the profits of that benefit, however great, after paying the established charges. Should there be a deficiency, we ensure that you shall clear £100 by it. This, upon mature deliberation, is

\* His son relates that his name suggested to Scott that of the hero of "Peveril of the Peak."

all we think prudence enables us to offer." The offer was accepted, and Young made his appearance at the Haymarket on the 22nd of June, 1807, as Hamlet. It was an undoubted success. But from one corner of the theatre came a persistent hiss. Young soon succeeded in detecting the malevolent personage, and recognized in him *his own father*. It was not the first time this excellent gentleman had given public proof of animosity against his children. Once he entered a hackney-coach in which one of his sons (who afterwards attained some eminence as a surgeon) was sitting, and, without speaking a word, struck him a blow in the face. The young man ordered the coach to stop, and, as he alighted, turned to the astonished passengers and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, that is my father."

But to return to Charles's *début*. Peake, writing of this period in "The Memoirs of the Colman Family," says: "Colman was fortunate this year in the engagement of Mr. Charles Young, from Manchester, who proved himself for many succeeding years an actor of sterling merit, a perfect gentleman in his manners, and a most delightful companion in private life. Mr. Young was, indeed, an honour to his profession." Boaden, in his "Memoirs of the Kembles," gives the following notice of his first appearance: "My amiable and accomplished friend, Mr. R. Westall, I remember, begged that we might see this *début* together; he had a side box at the

Haymarket on that night, and we received very great satisfaction from that able and judicious actor. Confessedly, however, it was the Hamlet of Kemble, discriminated only by the personal perfections, or, if you will, imperfections of the performer. It was not so philosophic, but more solemn; there was more vehemence, and less pathos; the volume of voice was great, and of good tone, but the articulation was not nice, and he laboured under a lisp whenever the letter *s* occurred. But there was great ardour, vast animation, powerful action, untiring energy, good sense."

He played a round of characters: Don Felix in "The Wonder," Rolla in "Pizarro," Penruddock in "The Wheel of Fortune," Petruchio, "The Stranger," and Sir Edward Mortimer in "The Iron Chest," with considerable success. The following year, 1808, he received an offer to join the Covent Garden company for the ensuing winter at eighteen pounds per week and a benefit.

John Philip was, of course, the paramount power at Covent Garden, Cooke was also one of the company, yet Young held his ground firmly, played Hamlet three times to Kemble's four, Othello to Cooke's Iago; Reuben Glenroy, Sir Edward Mortimer, Macbeth, Beverley, Lord Townley, &c. He achieved his greatest success, however, in Kemble's grand revival of "Julius Cæsar," in 1812, in which he played Cassius. Many people considered

it was a finer performance than Kemble's Brutus. Mr. Julian Young gives the following vivid description of the principal actors in this play :—

“ One would have imagined,” he says, “ that the invariable white toga, common to all the male performers, beautiful as it is when properly worn and tastefully adjusted, would have rendered it difficult at first for any but frequenters of the theatre to distinguish, in the large number of the *dramatis personæ* on the stage, John Kemble from Daniel Terry, or Charles Young from Charles Kemble. Whereas I feel persuaded that any intelligent observer, though he had never entered the walls of a theatre before, if he had but studied the play in his closet, would have had no difficulty in recognizing the calm, cold, self-contained, stoical dignity of John Kemble's *walk*; the very ideal of Marcus Brutus; or in the pale, wan, austere, ‘lean and hungry look’ of Young, and in his quiet and nervous *pace*, the irritability and impetuosity of Caius Cassius; or in the handsome, joyous face and graceful, joyous tread of Charles Kemble, his pliant body bending forward in courtly adulation of ‘great Cæsar,’ Mark Antony himself; while Fawcett's sour, sarcastic countenance would not more aptly portray ‘quick-mettled’ Casca than his abrupt and hasty stamp upon the ground when Brutus asked him, ‘What had chanced that Cæsar was so sad?’ ”

Young was an intense admirer of his great proto-

type, and the latter seems to have been partial to his young rival and *confrère*. The last time they played together was in this tragedy. After the curtain fell, Kemble entered Young's dressing-room, and presented him with several "properties" he had worn in favourite characters, and begged him to keep them in memory of their having fought together, alluding to the battle of Sardis in the play. "Well," he said, "we have often had high words on the stage, but never off." On Young saying something that touched him, he caught hold of his hand, wrung it in his, and then hurried from the room.

Young remained at Covent Garden until 1822. His salary had been raised to £25 a week, but in that year the great attraction of Edmund Kean at Drury Lane, so lowered the receipts of the rival house that a general reduction of salaries was proposed, and Young was informed that from that time the management could not afford to give him more than £20 a week. He refused to submit to the proposal. The Drury Lane managers hearing of this, immediately offered him £50 a night, the same sum they were paying Edmund Kean, to perform three nights a week for nine months. The offer was immediately accepted, and bills were forthwith posted over all London, announcing that Edmund Kean and Charles Young would appear together in "Othello."

In 1823 Young returned to Covent Garden. Twelve months before the managers had lost his services for a paltry £5 a week; they were now glad to give him his Drury Lane salary, £50 per night, and from that time he never received a less sum. In 1828 he essayed Cooke's great part, Sir Pertinax Macsycophant, and in the same year he played Rienzi in Miss Mitford's tragedy of that name. Strange to say, in an age that was so fruitful in dramatic writing, good, bad, and indifferent, while Kean, the Kembles, and even Macready, then only just rising out of obscurity, had authors more than enough to write for them, Young continued only to repeat the old parts, or perform such new ones as did not rise in importance above two or three others in the same play.

In 1829 he received an offer from the United States of £12,000 for a ten months' engagement, but having already made up his mind to retire, and being in a position to regard with indifference even so tempting a bait, he declined it. His farewell benefit took place at Covent Garden on May 31st, 1832, and Hamlet, the part he had chosen for his first appearance in London twenty-five years before, he selected to take his final leave of the London public. In honour to him, Mathews appeared as Polonius, Macready as the Ghost. So great was the demand for places that the orchestra was converted into stalls, an almost unprecedented event in

those days of an uninvaded pit. The receipts were £643, and £81 were returned to those who were unable to find even standing room.

He survived his retirement twenty-four years, dying in 1856, at the advanced age of seventy-nine. A letter written to his son by a lady who knew him well, thus eloquently and pathetically describes the closing years of his life:—

“His gifts and accomplishments were varicus. His musical taste, his melodious voice, his wide range of anecdote, his extensive knowledge of life, his humorous power of pourtraying character, his arch, droll, waggish ways and stories, lent to his companionship a charm, which rendered him a desired guest in many of the stateliest houses of our aristocracy, where young men and maidens would gather round him eagerly: the one to discuss the incidents of the ‘run,’ and the comparative merits of dogs and horses (for your father, as you know, rode well and delighted in the chase); the other to beg for hints over their song books, and to listen to his exquisite recitations, while all of every age and degree could thoroughly enjoy the waggery of his spirits, and join in the laughter called forth by his innocent peculiarities. He had a somewhat stately manner, tinged no doubt by the old dramatic element, which was so pronounced in him—and so far he was certainly artificial—but this was eagerly distinguished from his true nature, so that

it only imparted a kind of grotesque flavour to his quaint, and sometimes grandiloquent, treatment of trifles.

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“Many were the acts of large and thoughtful liberality that signalised his life throughout long years, and which became known only when infirmity and failing memory obliged him to lean on others as his almoners. By the side of his sick bed stood a little mahogany table with an ever opening drawer, into which the large white hand would be thrust as oft as any tale of sorrow or application for help reached his ears. ‘What will ye have?’ was the only question asked, and out came the gold and silver without stint; and ‘Mind ye let me know when ye want more for the poor creatures!’ was sure to be his parting injunction. . . . I have often wished that Gainsborough or Sir Joshua could have drawn him as he sat in his richly brocaded dressing-gown and black velvet cap, with the dark eyes gleaming from beneath the great eyebrows; the snowy hair, and grave serene mouth firmly closed, until some sally of nonsense from one of his grandsons, or some stray joke from an odd nook in his own memory, would light up the old face with the rippling sunshine of mirth, and show how light a heart he carried beneath the burden of fourscore years. . . . To those who did, and who count it a joy for ever to have loved and been loved

by him, I commend his dear memory. He wore the grand old name of gentleman unsullied to the end, and died in the fulness of his years beloved, honoured, and lamented."

He was very eccentric in his habits, of which his son relates some very amusing particulars.

"He considered humidity the besetting sin of our insular climate, and thought it therefore expedient to counteract its effects by scientific rule. He had but little scientific knowledge, and as I have less than none, I will not attempt to define what I do not understand; but he *talked* much of the benefits of the rarefication of the air by means of heat. The practical results of his theory I could understand when I would enter his bedroom in the middle of July, at night time, and see a perfect furnace blazing up the chimney; his bedroom candle lighted on a chest of drawers; two wax candles lighted on the chimney; two lighted on his toilet-table; a policeman's lantern lighted for the night; and the handle of a warming-pan protruding from his bed, and remaining there till he was prepared to enter it."

He preferred adulterated articles to pure ones; manufactured champagne to the juice of the grape, &c. He had a horror of a home-baked loaf, and never went into the country without making a descent upon a baker's shop, "and filling the carriage with white, vicious, alummy bread, sufficient to

have lasted our household through a siege of moderate duration." He would never have his fires lit with any other wood but certain prepared chips, covered with resin, which he carried about in huge stacks.

Mr. Fitzgerald has well defined Young's position in his profession, when he says ("Life of the Kembles") he "does not light up an era." His name is not associated in our minds with a new starting-point in theatrical annals, as that of Betterton, Garrick, Kemble, Kean, and even Macready. But for all that he must have been an admirable actor, even when placed among so many brilliant stars as adorned the stage in his time. That he had the instincts of a true artist is sufficiently proved by the following anecdote. One day when conversing with a friend on the importance of an actor possessing the power of realising a character, he mentioned that in his early career, while acting Othello, the struggle in his mind between his love for his wife and the sense of wrong she was supposed to have done him, so overwhelmed him, that after smothering her he was in such an ecstasy of remorse and misery, that he flung himself upon the bed, burst into a paroxysm of tears, and was only recalled to the fact that the murder he had committed was not a reality by the rapturous applause of the audience.

## CHAPTER V.

### MASTER BETTY.

Early Passion for the Stage—His *Début* at Belfast—Creates a Great Sensation at Dublin—At Edinburgh and Glasgow—Opens at Drury Lane—Extraordinary Scene—Mrs. Inchbald's Description of his Acting—Parroted—The Betty Mania—Anecdotes — Caricatures — Enormous Receipts—A Fall—Macready's Estimation of his Abilities—His Death.

PERHAPS the most extraordinary dramatic success on record was that of the boy whose name heads the present chapter. Henry West Betty, Irish by descent, was born at Shrewsbury in 1791. His father, it would appear, was a man of some means; his mother had a taste for reading and recitation, and imparted it to her son, whose dramatic capabilities she probably discovered, and cultivated with an eye to business. As the story runs, his passion for the stage arose from his being taken to the Belfast Theatre when he was about eleven years old, to see Mrs. Siddons play Elvira

in "Pizarro." His parents were ready enough to indulge his passion, and at once placed him under Houghton, the prompter of the theatre, for instruction. The boy was bright and intelligent, and proved an excellent pupil.

On the 11th of August, 1803, he made his *début* on the Belfast stage, as Osman in a translation of Voltaire's "Zaïre." He was highly successful, and afterwards appeared as Douglas, Rolla, Romeo, and Hamlet, at Cork, Waterford, Limerick, and Dublin. These were the days of the "United Irishmen," and the streets of Dublin were cleared by a certain hour at night; but the authorities extended the time in honour of "the Young Roscius," as the Milesians dubbed him, and notices were printed in the bills that people leaving the theatre, during his engagement, would not be stopped until after eleven o'clock. From Ireland he proceeded to Scotland, where he created a great *furor*. Jackson, the Edinburgh manager, published the following fulsome notice of his acting. "It is one of those singularities of Nature that neither history nor tradition can furnish, but which is now beheld by us; but can never be seen again till the AUTHOR of all things shall, when He thinks meet, condescend to endue another stripling in *embryo* with a similar incredible combination of stage endowments, for the gratification of contemporary admiration." Home, the author of "Douglas," then seventy years of age,

sat at the wings to see him play young Norval. "This is the first time," he said, "I ever saw the part of Douglas played, that is, according to my idea of the character as at the time I conceived and wrote it." Whether he really believed that this boy played the part better than did Spranger Barry, and other great actors who had essayed it, or whether vanity coloured his judgment, it would be difficult to say. At Glasgow, a critic who dared to find fault with the idol's performance, raised such a storm about his head that he was obliged to leave the city.

Very soon the patentees of Drury Lane offered him an appearance at the National Theatre—the terms, half the receipts of his benefit. But he was advised to refuse anything under £50 a night. The advice was taken, and the negotiations were suspended; upon which the Covent Garden manager stepped in and closed for the required sum.

Pending his opening in London, which was arranged for the December of that year (1804), he visited other English towns, creating an ever-increasing mania wherever he went. At Liverpool, crowds, eager to secure places for the night, would assemble round the box-office at an early hour in the morning, and when it was opened, the crush was so fierce that gentlemen were bruised and half suffocated, had their clothes torn to ribbons, their

hats and even their shoes carried away. For his fourteen performances here he cleared, with benefit, £1,520.

But it was reserved for London to crown the madness. At one o'clock in the afternoon, on the first of December, 1804, a prodigious concourse filled Bow Street and the piazzas of Covent Garden Theatre; towards evening the numbers and the pressure became so alarming, that it was thought necessary to send for a guard of soldiers to clear the entrance and form passages and approaches; but for this precaution, a terrible catastrophe must have occurred. A few minutes after the doors were opened the house was crammed. Gentlemen, knowing every seat in the boxes was taken, yet forced their way through and sprang over into the pit, to steal a march upon the pittites, others, less scrupulous, took forcible possession of box-seats previously engaged, and could not be dislodged; every lobby and passage was jammed with people content to pay any price, if they could only peep at the stage through a hole or a crevice: fainting women, and even men, by scores had to be drawn out of the mass, and gentlemen wedged into suffocating corners were kept from swooning only by their wives constantly fanning them. Drury Lane, with a very weak bill, took over £300 from the overflow of its neighbour.

The play was "Barbarossa," an English version

of Voltaire's "Mérope." The first act, in which the star did not appear, was performed in dumb show, so great was the uproar. But when at length Barbarossa gave the order for Achmet to be brought before him, it was as though an enchanter's wand had been suddenly waved over the clamorous concourse, turning it to stone ; a deathlike silence fell upon it, not a movement, not a whisper was heard, the very breath was held in intensity of expectation. As he stepped from the wing, attired in the close-fitting dress of a slave, which made his small figure appear even smaller upon that great stage, the spell was lifted, and there burst forth a roar of applause almost terrible in its force. The boy, although remarkable for his modest and unassuming manners, had a marvellous self-possession, and was by no means flurried by this great reception.

Mrs. Inchbald, who was present, complained that "his preaching-like tones" fatigued her, but she acknowledged that in the latter acts he exhibited great fire, spirit and impassioned variety. "He is a clever little boy," she adds, "and had I never seen boys act before, I might have thought him exquisite." The green-room, however, caught the infection from the audience, and hailed him a prodigy, a transcendent genius, a second and greater Garrick ! "Nature has endowed him with genius we shall vainly attempt to find in anyone of the actors of the present day," wrote one of his critics.

That the boy was remarkably clever, there can be as little doubt as that his talents were in no degree commensurate with the sensation he created; his carriage and action were beautifully graceful, his aptitude keen, his capacity for study and his memory prodigious. As an instance: he is said to have studied Hamlet in less than four days; but although his voice was powerful and had a fine depth of tone, it was heavy and monotonous, his delivery was frequently too rapid for distinctness, and sometimes noisy to ranting; besides which it was disfigured by strong provincialisms and an absence of the letter *h*, the result of imperfect education. But above all, he had no originality of conception. Houghton, the Belfast prompter, taught him all, at least all his early and most successful parts. In the books out of which he studied, every inflection of the voice was marked, every movement of the arms and even of the legs. He owed everything to his instructor, and he was not ungrateful: one of the first uses he made of his good fortune, being to settle an annuity upon him.

His unprecedented success was partly the result of one of those mental epidemics, which have at times infected the public mind in all ages and all countries, and partly of that love for the abnormal which has always been an English characteristic. "Any strange being there makes a man," says Caliban, and the satirical remark will seemingly

never become obsolete. We may take some heart at our own theatrical short-comings when we read that John Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, George Frederick Cooke, Mrs. Jordan, Bannister, and many other lights, any one of whom would now make a star of the first magnitude, played to empty benches, while Master Betty was drawing the whole town, and that Charles Young, Charles Kemble and all the great actors, except *the* Kemble and his great sister, had to play seconds to this "puny whipster."

The Betty mania was now at its height. Macready, in his "Reminiscences," relates an anecdote how, when the boy stopped for the night at an hotel in Dunchurch, a lady of one of the leading county families entreated the landlord to get her a sight of the young Roscius. Boniface suggested there was only one way of gratifying her wish: he and his parents were just about to dine, and she could carry in one of the dishes as though she were a servant. The lady was eagerly grateful and made one of the waiters at table throughout the meal! In London, titled ladies contended for the honour of having him sit beside them in their carriage, and raved about "the divine Master Betty." Opie painted him as Young Norval, Northcote, in Vandyke costume, leaving the tomb of Shakspeare, intimating that he had stolen thence the Promethean fire of genius. "Gentleman" Smith, now an old man, came all the way from Bury St. Edmunds to

see him act, and after the performance presented him with a seal bearing Garrick's likeness. "Mr. Garrick," he said, "bade me during his last illness keep this until I should meet a player who acted from Nature and feeling; such I have found in you." When overwork brought upon him a short illness, bulletins were issued at intervals during the day, and were waited for as eagerly as though he had been some great personage upon whom the fate of the kingdom depended. Charles James Fox read Zanga to him, and William Pitt once made a motion of adjournment in the Commons, in order that he and the other members might be able to see him act some particular part; while the University of Cambridge, not to be outdone in the general enthusiasm, made him the subject of a prize medal, the theme being "*Quid noster Roscius egit?*"

Cumberland says, "How delicious to be caressed by Dukes, and what is better by Dukes' daughters, flattered by wits, feasted by aldermen, and stuck up in the windows of print-shops—what encouragement does this great enlightened nation hold up to merit! I declare I saw with surprise a man who led about a bear lose all his popularity in the street where this exquisite young gentleman had his lodgings, the people ran to see him at the window, and left bear and bear-leader in solitude. I saw this exquisite young gentleman wafted to his morning's rehearsal in a vehicle that to my vulgar optics

seemed to bear upon its polished doors a ducal crown. I looked to see if John Kemble were on the braces, or Cooke perchance behind the coach. I saw the lacquies at their post, but Glenalvon was not there. I found John Kemble sick at home, and said to myself—

“ ‘ Oh what a time have you chosen out, brave Caius,  
To wear a 'kerchief, would you were not sick.' ”

Besides pictures of his person of all degrees of likeness and unlikeness, numbers of caricatures adorned the print-sellers' windows. One represented him striding from roof to roof of the two great theatres, for he was now playing at both, as we shall shortly see, and Kemble and Sheridan looking up ruefully at the new Colossus. Another pictured him and Kemble mounted on the same horse, Kemble behind, and these words coming out of young Betty's mouth :—“ I don't mean to affront you, but when two persons ride on a horse one must ride behind ! ”

His engagement at Covent Garden was to play three nights weekly ; so Drury Lane made an arrangement with him for the off-nights. For the first three performances he received £50 ; for the remainder (twenty-five) £100, besides four benefits, each of which was, with presents, worth one thousand pounds. The gross receipts for the twenty-eight nights were £17,210 11s. The

nightly average being £614 13s. 3d. The largest amount taken in one night, £752, was to Douglas ; on three occasions the takings exceeded seven hundred.

After making another tour of the provinces he returned the following autumn to Drury Lane, but the spell was dissolved, the mania subsiding ; a clique of the more judicious playgoers organized a determined opposition to popular folly. The average receipts fell to £341 a night, or little more than half of those of a few months back ; his benefit realised only £301, being lower than those of Mrs. Jordan, Miss Duncan, Braham and Bannister, all of which took place about the same time. More than once the management appears to have purposely set him in a ludicrous position, as for instance when, in *Gustavus Vasa*, they placed him between the two tallest and stoutest men in the company, and gave him Mrs. St. Leger, a woman of enormous proportions, for mother. His power of attraction diminished nightly, and the days of his greatness, at least in London, were over. They had been brief, brilliant and profitable.

But although the metropolis had had enough of "the Young Roscius," the provincials still flocked to see him as eagerly as ever. At fifteen, however, he entered himself as a student at Cambridge, for the church. But the spell of *Thalia* and *Melpomene*

is not so easily broken, and upon the completion of his education he returned once more to the arena of his boyish triumphs. Maturity had not ripened his talents, and he met with only indifferent success.

Writing of this time, Macready was disposed to think his talents were not properly appreciated, that the public seemed to resent upon the man the blind idolatry they had lavished upon the boy. There was a sort of sing-song in his delivery, he says, that suggested words learned by heart rather than flowing from impulse, "but, when warmed into passion, he became possessed with the spirit of the scene, and in witnessing, as I have done, his illustration of passages with all the originality and fire of genius, the conviction was pressed upon me that if he had not had to his prejudice the comparison of his boyish triumphs, and the faulty manner derived from frequent careless repetition, he would have maintained a distinguished position in his maturer years." He adds, in another place, "There was a depth of feeling in his latter scenes of Osmyn (Zara) that held the audience wrapt in breathless attention; and of all the representations I have seen of Sir Edward Mortimer, he came next to Kean (though *longo intervallo*, for Kean was unapproachable in that character.) . . . . I do not think he studied improvement in his art,

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and in consequence deteriorated by becoming used up in the frequent repetition of the same parts."

He retired from the stage in 1824, but survived until August 24th, 1874.

## CHAPTER VI.

ROBERT WILLIAM ELLISTON.

Theatre Royal Pastry Cook Shop—At Bath—Engaged by Colman—The Iron Chest—Story of King George the Third—An Extraordinary “Double”—The Duke Aranza—Origin of the Surrey Theatre—Anecdotes of Rowland Hill—A Grotesque Quarrel—Origin of the Olympic Theatre—The Bohemian and Fireworks Hoax—A Coup de Théâtre—Making use of a Friend—Lessee of Drury Lane—The Company—Elliston in the Character of Shopman—A Triumphal Entry—A Royal Benediction—An Embarrassing Dinner Party—Bankruptcy—Last Appearance—“Bribery and Corruption”—Talfourd upon his Acting.

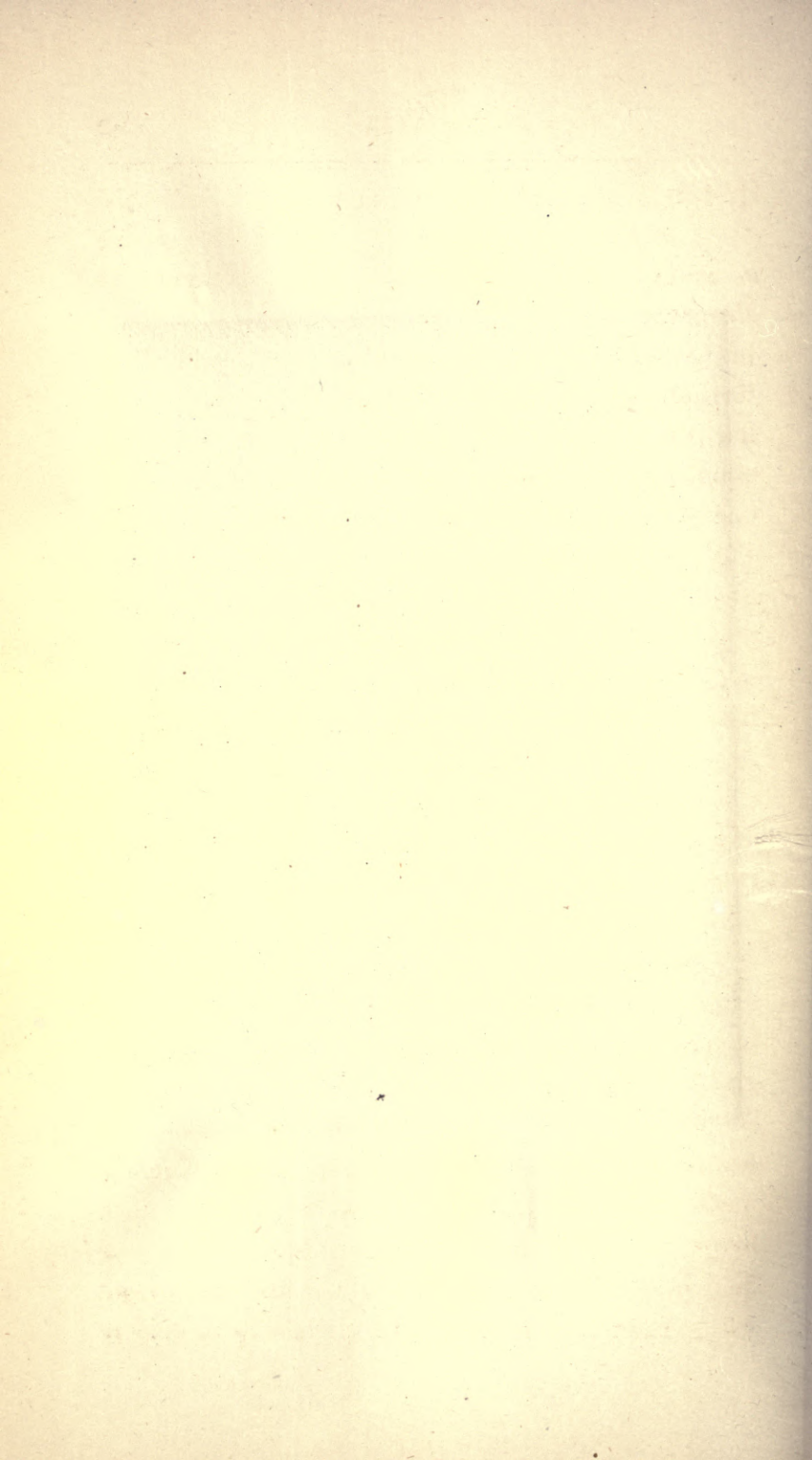
“**M**AGNIFICENT were thy capriccios on this globe of earth, ROBERT WILLIAM ELLISTON!” apostrophises Charles Lamb. “Wherever Elliston walked, sat, or stood still, there was the theatre. He carried about with him his pit, boxes, and galleries, and set up his portable playhouse at corners of streets and in the market-places. Upon flintiest pavements he trod the boards still; and if his theme chanced to be passionate, the green baize carpet of tragedy spontaneously rose beneath his feet,” &c.

This famous comedian, who has been immortal-



*Woodburytype.*

R. W. ELLISTON.



ized by Elia's matchless pen, was born in Orange Street, Bloomsbury, in 1774; his father was a watchmaker; his uncles, Dr. Elliston and the Reverend Thomas Martyn, were professors at Cambridge; they both took a great interest in the boy's fortunes, placed him at St. Paul's School, and stood his friends throughout their lives. When he was about seventeen he attended a French class held by one Madame Cotterille, who lived over a pastrycook shop in Bedford Street, Strand. Twice in the year this lady got up an amateur performance among her pupils; at one of these Elliston appeared as Pyrrhus in "The Distressed Mother," with such success that from that time he conceived a passion for the stage. Among the pupils was another future great actor, Charles Mathews, who, on Robert Williams' second appearance, played the Chaplain to his Chamont, in Otway's "Orphan." In addition to this, Mathews tells us, in his autobiography:—

"He gave a specimen of his vocal powers by singing, between the play and farce, 'To Anacreon in Heaven,' at a table covered with punch-bowl and glasses, while the scholars sat round as a chorus. A gayer specimen of juvenile jollity I never witnessed. His joyous exuberance of mirthful enjoyment was worthy Bacchus himself. His laughter-loving eye and round dimpled face were never displayed to more advantage, even in after years, when crowded audiences gave their testimony to

his mirth-inspiring comic powers : all predicted his future greatness."

The end of this amateuring was that at eighteen he ran away from home and school, and proceeded to Bath. There, after some difficulty and delay, he succeeded in being engaged by William Dimond, the then lessee of the theatre. His opening part was Tressel, in Colley Cibber's version of "Richard the Third," which he performed to the satisfaction of manager and audience, and even of the critics, who gave him a flattering notice in the next issue of newspapers. He next migrated to Leeds, and ranged himself under the banner of our old friend Tate Wilkinson. Here the promise of the Theatre Royal Pastrycook Shop was more than fulfilled, and, although he had been but a few months upon the stage, he played principal business with marked success. Indeed, so rapid was his progress, that Kemble entered into negotiations with him for Drury Lane; these, however, came to nothing, and he went back to Bath, where he found a wife in the person of a Miss Rundell, a teacher of dancing, an amiable lady, who proved to him a most estimable and faithful partner. The Bath Theatre was, at this period, the best out of London, and any actor who made a success upon its boards was certain of obtaining an opening in the metropolis. Five years in this admirable school educated the promising novice into a finished actor of exceptional abilities,

and in the summer of 1796 he made his *début* at the Haymarket as Octavian, in Colman's once-famous musical drama of "The Mountaineers," and as Vapour in the farce of "My Grandmother." "No performer of better promise has presented himself in London for many years," was the dictum of a leading journal. His success, both with the public and the press, was at once assured.

His Bath engagement compelled him to leave London in the following month. Colman, however, secured him for the next season, at the opening of which he appeared successfully as Sir Edward Mortimer in "The Iron Chest," in which Kemble had so signally failed in the previous winter. This was a triumph of no mean order, and that triumph he achieved—thus performing the almost unprecedented feat of revivifying a condemned play. So rapidly did he now rise in popularity, that the Covent Garden manager offered him £200 for twelve performances. During his London engagement, he did some extraordinary feats in travelling, for those non-steam days, playing at Covent Garden one night and at Bristol the next, for upwards of a week; he also performed alternate nights at Bath and Windsor.

Elliston was a great favourite with their Majesties George the Third and Queen Charlotte; he had taken the Weymouth Theatre, and, during a stay of the King in this, his favourite watering-place, had

obtained his bespeak. On the night in question, the manager came down early to see that all was in proper order; upon entering the royal box, he was startled to find a gentleman there fast asleep; a second glance showed him it was the King himself. It was nearly time to open the doors, but how to awake the royal sleeper? Suddenly a happy thought suggested itself; descending into the orchestra, he took up a violin and began playing "God Save the King." His Majesty awoke, and looked out of the box. "Hey, hey, what, what!" he cried, with a dazed look. "Oh, I see, Elliston. Rain came on—ran in here—took a nap. What's o'clock?" "Nearly six, Your Majesty." "Six! Send to Her Majesty—say I'm here. Stay, stay; this wig won't do. Eh, eh—don't keep the people waiting; light up—let 'em in—light up—let 'em in. Ah, ah! fast asleep; play well to-night, Elliston—great favourite with the Queen." When, after the performance was over, the manager attended the royal party to their carriage, the King continued to repeat, with a chuckle, "Fast asleep, eh, Elliston, fast asleep."

Already those extraordinary eccentricities which have rendered Elliston more famous even than his talents, and those unfortunate habits which ultimately proved his ruin and death, had begun to develop themselves. Heavy drinking was the besetting sin of the age, and indulged in by every

class, from the prince to the labourer ; it was impossible then that actors, whose temptations are so far greater than those of private men, should have been exempt from the prevailing vice ; it proved the destruction of more than one of the most brilliant of their order. That is all changed now, however, and there is no body of public men more sober than actors. But, alas ! good and evil go hand in hand together ; somehow talent and respectability never seem to agree—at least it is quite evident it is so in the present case : actors are but dull dogs now-a-days. To a too great fondness for the bottle Elliston added a passion for gambling. Probably it was only the earnings of his wife, who kept a dancing academy with a large and aristocratic connection, first in Bath and afterwards in London, that saved him from ruin in the early part of his career.

During the Bath recess, when not playing in town, he indulged in strolling, took the Theatres Royal Wells and Shepton Mallet, with a company of some half-dozen people, playing himself Hamlet and harlequin, or Macbeth and clown, in one night. On one occasion he "doubled" the parts of Richard the Third and Richmond. In the fifth act of the play these two characters succeed each other in every alternate scene, but meet in the last for the fight. A little adjustment of dress and a little alteration of voice sufficed to mystify the rustics, until the climax, when a scene-shifter dressed up

was thrust on to represent Richmond, with directions to keep his back well to the audience, not open his lips, but at the cue "fight like the devil," while Elliston, shifting about his position and changing his tones, alternately hurled defiance at Richard and Richmond.

In 1803 he bade farewell to Bath, and from that period London became his home. So great was his popularity that in that same year, finding the Haymarket Theatre wholly inadequate to accommodate his numerous patrons, he took the King's Theatre opposite for his benefit. By five o'clock in the afternoon the crowd was so great and so obstreperous, that they broke down the doors and poured into the house. Money-takers and check-takers were borne down by the crush, and after the place was filled the money had to be collected. He himself was one of those who went round, euphuistically announcing that "the terms of admission had not in many cases been complied with." And when he had to apologise for ten rows of people seated upon the stage, he declaimed upon the necessity of accommodating those who had done him an honour, the remembrance of which would never be eradicated from his heart, and humbly trusted that they would not deny to a Briton that favour their spontaneous goodness formally granted to a foreigner—alluding to Catalani. The play was "Pizarro." The crowd on the stage made a half-

circle round the actors. In the first act, as Elvira rose from the couch on which she is discovered at the opening of the scene, her mantle fell off, upon which a young lady, quite forgetting where she was, picked it up and very politely begged to be allowed to replace it upon the actress's shoulders. The *contretemps* must have been somewhat embarrassing in a tragic scene.

The next season he was at Drury Lane, where he made one of his most marked successes as Duke Aranza in "The Honeymoon." Poor Tobin's comedy had long lain shrouded by dust in the managerial limbo, and was dragged out only as a *pis aller* to fill up a gap. But it proved a trump card, and holds the stage to this day. Like Gerald Griffin's "Gisippus," it was, however, a posthumous birth, and the ears that had once longed for such acclamations were now mouldering in the grave. It is agreed upon all sides that Elliston's acting in this comedy was the very perfection of art, and has never since been approached. Yet his salary at this time was only £20 a week. Actors who, in those days, would have been considered scarcely worthy of a third-rate position, now command that sum. But then benefits, which have become a thing of the past, represented alone a large income; by the one just mentioned Elliston cleared more than £600. His monetary position may be guessed from the fact of his taking, about this

period, a house in Stratford Place; an absurd piece of ostentation, however, against which all his friends endeavoured to dissuade him.

A passion for management now seized upon him, and he was at one time in treaty for the theatres of Dublin, Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham—the two last he ultimately secured—to say nothing of such small fry as Croydon, Leicester, Leamington, of which he also became lessee. In 1809, he took upon lease the circus in the Blackfriars Road, and altered it into a theatre. Rowland Hill's chapel was building at the same time, and that modern Prynne was very irate at seeing "the devil's house" progressing so much more rapidly than his conventicle, and made frequent appeals to *his* audience to loosen their purse-strings. The following are good anecdotes of this preacher. A friend of his, one William Walker, had taken the Haymarket Theatre during a recess, to lecture upon astronomy, but had done so in fear and trembling lest this denouncer of playhouses should disapprove. But in this he was mistaken, for one day after service Hill thus addressed his auditory: "You have often, my friends, heard me denounce playhouses as temples of sin and habitations of the devil, and I say so still, for their works are carnal and their words ungodly. But when our beloved friend and brother, William Walker, introduces the heavenly bodies, it is quite another thing; you may enter freely, enter

without prejudice to your souls, and with great benefit to your understandings. And now let me scatter these notices among you" (throwing bills from the pulpit). "You may go freely on Friday next, I tell you, and I hope you will!"

Upon the burning down of Covent Garden, this excellent Christian announced it from the pulpit as "Great news, my brethren, a great triumph has taken place over the devil and the stage-players—a fire in one of their houses. Oh, may there be one consumed in every fire, it is my fervent prayer!" Yet a score of firemen lost their lives in the conflagration.

Elliston opened the Surrey Theatre on Easter Monday, 1809; he was then playing at the Lyceum, whither the Drury Lane company had migrated after the burning of their theatre. In 1811 he returned to the Haymarket at £40 per week and two clear benefits. During the season, a grotesque quarrel and reconciliation took place between him and Munden.

One of Munden's favourite points in *Old Rapid*, the tailor ("Cure for the Heartache"), was to unfold a new coat upon the back of a chair, and, with all the pride of an artist, remove one by one the papers that enveloped the brass buttons. This always brought down great laughter and applause. One night Elliston, who was playing *Young Rapid*, was seized with an irresistible impulse to appropriate this business; he did so, and carried off the usual

honours. As soon as the scene was over, Munden, with tears in his eyes, rushed into the green-room. "Where is he? Let me tear him to pieces!" he cried. "Where is this Jackanapes?" Elliston had ensconced himself behind the folds of Mrs. Glover's satin dress, but the enraged actor, darting upon him, dragged him forth, and calling him "assassin," "parricide," soundly belaboured him. Four nights afterwards they played together in the "Road to Ruin." At the end of the third act, Munden again ran into the green-room crying, "Where is he?" "Ah, Bobby," he said, running up to him, "I forgive you the buttons; you have made me to-night—immortalised yourself. I'll never play with any Harry Dornton but you, Bobby. You've beat us all to-night. But, Bobby," he added, in a more serious tone, "don't dash my buttons any more."

Astley, wishing to get rid of the Olympic Pavilion, in Wych Street, that he had built for a circus, made overtures to Elliston to take it. Although the lessee of some half-dozen others already, he eagerly seized upon the offer. "The very thing for me!" he exclaimed, "so near Drury; such a family circle; I'll set about it directly." But the proprietors of the patent theatre thought "Little Drury," as he had christened it, somewhat too near, and there being a flaw in the licence, it was closed at the end of a month. It reopened, however, after an interval, and among the company

engaged, was Edmund Kean; this, however, has been already alluded to in my first chapter upon that actor.

Business at Birmingham had been very bad for some time, when the walls were suddenly covered with bills announcing the appearance at the Theatre Royal of a Bohemian of extraordinary strength and stature, who would go through various evolutions with a stone of upwards of a ton weight, which he would toss about as easily as a tennis-ball. The night announced for his appearance came; the house was crowded; the audience had scarcely patience to listen to the words of the play, all were on the tip-toe of expectation for the performance of this modern Hercules. At length the curtain fell; then came a delay, during which impatience broke into furious clamour. At length, with pale and woeful face, Elliston rushed before the curtain: "The Bohemien has deceived me," he cried; "*that* I could have pardoned, but he has deceived you, my friends, *you*," and for a moment he hid his face behind his pocket-handkerchief, as though to conceal his emotion. Then bursting forth again he went on, "I repeat he has deceived me; he is not here. The man, of whatever name or nation he may be, who breaks his word, commits an offence which—" Here this Joseph Surface aphorism was drowned by the yells of disappointed gods and pitites. "The correspondence," he continued, as soon as he could

again make himself heard, "is in my pocket;" and he drew forth a number of letters. "Does any gentleman here read German? if so, let him step forward." No gentleman volunteered. "Am I then left alone? Then I'll translate it for you." Another uproar, and one or two voices cried out, "No, no." Like Buckingham, he chose to consider this a "cheerful shout and general acclaim," and replacing the letters in his pocket, resumed, "I obey; the correspondence shall not be read; but the *stone* is here, you shall see it; you are my patrons, ladies and gentlemen, and you have a right to be satisfied." Here he winked at the orchestra, which struck up, "The Battle of Prague;" up went the curtain, and disclosed a huge sand rock labelled, "*This is the stone.*" It need scarcely be added the whole thing was a hoax, from beginning to end.

His passion for grandiloquent speech-making was irrepressible; he never neglected an opportunity of addressing the audience, and these addresses came to be regarded as a portion of the entertainment; many very highly amusing effusions of this kind have been preserved. While manager of the Worcester Theatre, he announced a grand display of fireworks for his benefit; the house was a mere bandbox, and such an exhibition was totally impracticable. This he well knew, and began to adroitly work upon the fears of the landlord, by hints of the

great danger of such an exhibition; the latter immediately took the alarm, and, as Elliston had foreseen, forbade it. The announcements, however, were not withdrawn, and the public swallowed the hoax—what will it not swallow?—and crowded the theatre. Without any reference being made to the great attraction of the night, the performance proceeded until there gradually rose a cry, which soon swelled into a clamour, for the fireworks. Then Elliston came forward with a stately air; he had made the most elaborate preparations, he said, for a grand pyrotechnic display, nothing had been left undone, but at the last moment came the reflection—what of the danger? Of the number of young, tender girls, of respectable matrons, all collected to do him honour? What if the theatre should take fire and be burned to the ground, the property, too, of one of the best and worthiest of men? Here he appealed to the landlord—a most nervous person, who was sitting in the stage-box, and who shrank back into a corner—to publicly state if he had not for the safety of his property, forbidden the display. The audience, thankful for the great “danger” they had escaped, applauded him heartily. “But, ladies and gentlemen,” he said, in conclusion, “I am happy to say I have made arrangements that will in some way make up for your disappointment—THE BAND (it consisted of three very vile fiddlers)—will strike up ‘God Save the King.’ ”

His harangues were not always confined to the audience, they were sometimes inflicted upon his employés. Planché tells a good story of this habit. He, Planché, had written a sort of speaking-pantomime for the Olympic called "Little Red Riding Hood." On the first night everything went wrong in the mechanical department. When the performance was over, he summoned all the carpenters and scene-shifters on to the stage, in front of a cottage-scene, having a practicable door and window. "Elliston," to use the narrator's words, "led me forward, and, standing in the centre, with his back to the footlights, harangued them in the most grandiloquent language—expatiating on the enormity of their offence, their ingratitude to the man whose bread they were eating, the disgrace they had brought upon the theatre, the cruel injury they had afflicted on the young and promising author by his side; then, pointing in the most tragical attitude to his wife and daughters, who were in his box, he bade them look upon the family they had ruined, and burying his face in his handkerchief to stifle his sobs, passed slowly through the door of the scene, leaving his auditors silent, abashed, and somewhat affected, yet rather relieved by being let off with a lecture. The next minute the casement was thrown violently open, and thrusting in his head, his face all scarlet with fury, he roared out, 'I discharge you all!' I feel my utter incapacity

to convey an idea of this ludicrous scene, and I question whether anyone acquainted with the man, his voice, action, and wonderful facial expression, could thoroughly realise the glorious absurdity of it from verbal description."

An actor of some provincial fame once called upon Elliston by appointment at Drury Lane Theatre. He found him upon the stage, and was welcomed with great politeness. After a time, however, the great manager conceived the idea that his visitor was not sufficiently impressed with his grandeur, and thought it necessary, by a *coup de théâtre*, to inspire the necessary amount of awe. "Yes, sir," he said, with a most solemn enunciation, "the drama—is now—at its lowest ebb—and—" then breaking off, he cried in a loud, imperious voice, "First night watchman!" The man stepped forward, bowed, and waited for orders. "And unless a material change— Other night watchman! —a material change—I say—takes place—as Juvenal justly— Prompter! As Juvenal justly observes— Boxkeeper, dress circle, right hand. But, sir, a reaction must take place when—*Other* boxkeepers! Sir, I say there must be a reaction— Copyist, call-boy!" Having collected all these personages about him, he, without taking any further notice of them, said to the actor in a dignified tone, "Follow me," and led the way to his private room.

But to return to his provincial experiences. While manager at Birmingham he met, one day, Howard Payne, the "American Roscius," with whom he had had some former intimacy. He was pressed by a variety of business at the time, but was announced to play Richard the Third on the Wednesday, and he was then proceeding to rehearsal. A sudden idea struck him; he begged Payne, as a particular favour, to superintend the rehearsal for him, as he had a most important engagement. After some little persuasion the other consented to do so. The instant they parted Elliston rushed away to the printer's, and ordered him to strike off three hundred bills announcing that Mr. Howard Payne, the American Roscius, having arrived in England, would have the honour of appearing on the following evening in his great impersonation of Richard the Third. By the time the rehearsal was over the bills were posted, and Payne saw the town placarded with his name. His astonishment and rage may be imagined. He sought for Elliston, but he had departed for Leicester and would not return until the next night. At first he vowed he would not appear, but was at length mollified by the urgent entreaties of the actors, who represented to him the theatre would be closed if he persisted in his refusal, and by the thought that he would also offend the Birmingham public, whose patronage he might thereafter require. In fine, he consented. The

house was crowded, the performance a success ; circumstances which condoned for all.

In 1819 Elliston achieved his highest ambition ; he became lessee of Drury Lane.

“ It was my fortune,” says Charles Lamb, “ to encounter him near St. Dunstan’s Church on the morning of his election to that high office. Grasping my hand with a look of significance, he only uttered, ‘ Have you heard the news ? ’ then with another look, following up the blow, he subjoined, ‘ I am the future manager of Drury Lane Theatre ! ’ Breathless as he saw me, he stayed not for congratulation or reply, but mutely stalked away, leaving me to chew upon his new-blown dignities at leisure. In fact nothing could be said to it. Expressive silence alone could muse his praise. This was his *great style*.”

He took Drury Lane at a rental of £10,200, all rates to be paid by him, with 635 free admissions, and a stipulation to spend £6000 upon beautifying and repairs before the commencement of the second season. Among his company were to be found the following names :—in tragedy, Kean, Pope, Holland, Powel, Mrs. West, Mrs. Egerton ; in comedy, himself, Dowton, Munden, Keeley, Harley, Oxberry, Mrs. Glover, Miss Kelly, Mrs. Edwin, Mrs. Orger ; in opera, Braham. He opened to £638, and during a season of 199 nights took £44,053, or an average of £220 nightly. Madame Vestris made her first

appearance in this season ; she does not seem to have created any sensation, although her success was assured before the close of the year 1820.

Elliston still kept on his provincial establishments, even the little barn at Leamington, where he would occasionally perform, the company consisting of himself, one lady, a couple of amateur tradesmen, and the doorkeeper's son. But he acted for all ; they had only to watch him, to come off and go on at his signal, while he spoke their parts and his own too, like the manager of a puppet-show.

Not even the management of half-a-dozen and more theatres, Drury Lane among the number, could absorb the energies of Robert William. He started a "Literary Association" at Bristol, purchasing the premises of a pickle shop for £1600. Here he collected old classics, black-letter volumes, antiquarian works, rare editions of choice books, fossils, shells, curiosities. There was a back parlour, which he called the "Lyceum," and to which he invited all Bristolians of literary and refined taste. But nobody came, and the man whom he had put in charge absconded with the little cash that was taken. Soon afterwards he started a circulating library at Leamington Spa, and placed it under the direction of his two sons. The following amusing sketch of him in the character of shopman is taken from Raymond's "Memoirs :"—"One morning he descended early into his shop, and

looking round with the irresistible humour of Tangent himself, 'It is my cruel fate,' said he, 'that my children will be gentlemen.' And on his sons making their appearance, they beheld their father, in an old dapple-grey frock-coat, dusting the books, arranging the ink-bottles, refilling the quires of *Bath Post*, and altering the position of the china mandarins with the veriest gravity in the world. One of the first customers that came in was a short, dirty-faced drab of a maid-servant, who brought some books to be exchanged; and nearly at the same moment a snivelling charity-boy, with a large patch of diachylon across his nose, placed himself at the counter demanding other articles. 'One at a time,' said Octavian with petrifying solemnity. 'Now, madam?' 'Missus 'as sent back these here and wants summat 'orrible.' 'The lady's name?' 'Wivian.' 'With a V or a W?' asked Elliston with the same solemnity; but the wench only grinned; when up mounted Sir Edward Mortimer, the ladder placed against the shelves, and withdrawing two wretchedly-torn volumes, clapped them together to liberate the dust, and placing them in the grubby claws of the now half-frightened girl, 'There,' said he, 'a work of surpassing terror; and, I declare, the leaves not cut. And now, sir,' to the boy, 'I will attend to you.' The lad, who by this time had nearly pulled the plaster from his nose, owing to the nervous state of agitation into which

he had been thrown, could not at the precise moment recollect his mission; when Elliston repeated with the intonation of a Merlin, 'And now, sir, I will attend to *you*.' 'Half a quire o' outsides and three ha'porth of mixed wafers,' screamed the urchin, throwing fourpence halfpenny upon the counter. 'Outsides,' repeated Elliston to his son William; 'Mixed wafers,' said he, in the same tone to Henry. Doricourt then demanded the paste-pot. Taking the brush, he first deliberately dabbed the lad's nose, thereby replacing the diachylon; and then seizing a watering-pot, much to the merriment of a few strangers who were by this time collected about the shop, began sprinkling the steps of the library door. Having played a few further antics, the 'Great Lessee' retired to answer his numerous London correspondents on the stupendous affairs of Drury Lane."

Upon his return from America, Kean wrote to him, offering to play a short engagement at Drury Lane. In a few hours London was placarded with posters announcing the reappearance of the great actor on the following Monday. The manager resolved to celebrate his arrival by a street procession, of which Raymond gives a grotesque description:—"On the Monday, about noon, a special courier announced the progress of Kean towards the door of Drury Lane, and within a quarter of an hour the cavalcade was in sight. Six outriders in

a medly costume of all the nations of the earth that do not go absolutely tattooed constituted the vanguard ; then came Elliston himself in solitary grandeur in his own carriage, drawn by four greys. The hero of the triumph next—Kean—likewise in his own carriage, supported by Russel and Hughes in cocked hats, drawn by four blacks. John Cooper followed, drawn also by four skewbalds or piebalds. A troop of horsemen formed the flank, composed of bruisers, jockeys, tavern-keepers, dog-fighters, and other friends of the drama ; and the whole was brought up by the heterogeneous rabble which the progressive affair had, from pillar to post, enlisted in its service.”

He celebrated the coronation of George IV. by a magnificent stage pageant, in which he reproduced all the features of the ceremony in a most gorgeous manner. He himself represented His Majesty. Amidst the tremendous applause which greeted the spectacle, he advanced with a most kingly air to the footlights, and, stretching forth his hands, and raising his eyes to heaven, uttered in a voice of the deepest solemnity the words, “ Bless ye, my people.” For the moment, he actually believed himself transformed into the real monarch. He had a medal struck for distribution among the audience in imitation of the Sovereign. Upon the death of Queen Caroline, a most extraordinary report was raised, that she had been poisoned by a cup of coffee pre-

sented her by Elliston during a visit to the theatre, in consequence of which he received a number of threatening letters from different persons. Some say the report was of his own raising, and indeed there is no eccentricity with which he might not be credited.

When it was proposed to raise a memorial to Shakespeare, some gentlemen of the Court called upon him to ascertain what he intended to do in the matter. After some conversation, he dismissed them with, "His Majesty and I will talk over the matter together." The following is a very good story, gathered from an unpublished letter of Peake's: There was a strong feud between the two great houses, and both were equally inimical to the managers of the Lyceum and the Haymarket, Arnold and Morris, who were trying to get the privileges of the patent houses abolished or modified. Dr. Kitchener, who was a friend of all four, hit upon what he thought the splendid idea of effecting a general reconciliation, and, for this purpose, sent invitations to all to dine with him on a certain evening, and inviting no other guests. The astonishment of the four rivals upon finding themselves thus ranged into a quartette may be imagined. After some embarrassment, they could not withstand the ludicrousness of the situation, and burst into a hearty laugh; they resolved to put a good face upon the matter, set aside mutual differences for that

evening at least, and avoid all reference to theatrical affairs. This was exactly what Dr. Kitchener did not want, and at every pause he tried to introduce the topic he desired to be discussed, but for a time all his efforts were adroitly parried. At length, as the Doctor's wine began to tell upon Elliston's brain, he could no longer repress the dignity of the patent; rising with an air of overwhelming hauteur, he put his hand upon Arnold's head, and exclaimed, "Minor manager, I will lay my hand on you and crush you!" A roar of laughter greeted this sally, and put everyone in good humour for the rest of the evening.

But the end of his greatness was now coming fast; in 1826 he shared the fate of most theatrical managers; and became a bankrupt; dissipation and a course of wild speculation and extravagance, however, rather than failure of public patronage, were the causes of this catastrophe. He was also treated very harshly and very badly by the directors. During the seven years he held the theatre, he laid out £30,000 in improving the property, and paid £66,000 in rent; all his liabilities amounted to only £5,500, and for this he offered to find security, but all compromise was refused.

His last appearance at Drury Lane was in the character of Falstaff. He had studied the part with great diligence, his rehearsals had excited hopes of a great success among the friends who witnessed them;

the performance, however, did not quite realize their expectations. On the second night he resolved to make yet greater efforts. He was labouring under extreme debility, but he ate little, and drank only one glass of Madeira. The first two acts were played with great vigour, but they exhausted his strength; from that period he began to flag, and in his scene with the Prince in the fifth act he fell, in utter exhaustion, prostrate upon the stage.

But all was not lost. Just at this time the Surrey, which he had given up, was in the market; by the aid of friends he raised sufficient money to take it, and again embark in management. Fortune, which had always stuck to him with a constancy almost unique in that fickle deity, still smiled upon him, and he was successful. His great trump card was Jerrold's "Black-eyed Susan," by which he realised a large sum.

His last appearance upon any stage was on the 24th of June, 1831, in the character of Sheva in "The Jew." "Black-eyed Susan" was performed for the 221st time as the afterpiece; on that night he played with greater effect than he had done for several years. At the end of the performance he made his customary speech, humorously imagining himself a *débutant*. It was bold for so young a man as himself, he said, to address such an audience, but it would be ungrateful in him not to make some acknowledgment for the encouragement he

had received; that he had appeared on that night as the immediate descendant of an old actor, one Mr. Elliston, who had for many years enjoyed the public favour, but who a few weeks before had judiciously

"Walk'd sober off, before a sprightlier age  
Came tittering on, to thrust him from the stage."

On the 8th of July he expired.

Almost his last words were characteristic. Within a few hours of his death he objected to take some medicine, and in order to induce him to do so, he was promised brandy-and-water to follow. "A faint smile stole over his face, the old roguish light gleamed for a moment in his fast glazing eyes, as he murmured, '*Bribery and corruption.*'"

"If," says Serjeant Talfourd, "we might venture to suggest one characteristic of Elliston's acting, as pervading the entire range of delightful images he embodied within our recollection, and distinguishing him from his contemporaries, we should refer to the perfection with which the elements of earnestness and gaiety were blended in his nature. Others have possessed each in a higher degree, or both, but as separate powers producing strong contrasts; but no one ever so continually presented the brilliant and affecting tragi-comedy of life. . . . He was best of all when, amidst his sedateness, a bright twinkle of humour told you

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he was wiser than his gravity and could be merry when he pleased, or when wild mirth sprang out of deep feeling, and remorse enforced its lessons by hints of a frightful ecstasy. . . . His performance of Rover in 'Wild Oats' was, perhaps, the most congenial with his nature of all his later representations; hit the happiest points between stern truth and delightful falsehood, and presented the liveliest picture of such a life as his own, catching in its course the colour of a myriad sentiments and modes of thought and being, but preserving a deep current of personal consciousness and enjoyment beneath all changes."

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ELDER MATHEWS.

His Birthplace and Early Associations—The Schoolmaster of the Old Type—A Backslider—Stage Struck—A Richard that would not be Killed—A Droll Looking Lover—A Touch of Romance—Tate Wilkinson's Opinion of him—The Botany Bay of Actors—Among Savages—Engaged for the Haymarket—Birth of Young Charles—Scott's Companion to Kenilworth—His Accident—"At Home"—Secession from the Dramatic Stage—Wonderful Mr. Pennyman—Godwin—His Transformations—Imitations at Carlton House—As the Spanish Ambassador—Visit to America—Embarrassments—As Sir Fretful Plagiary—Coleridge's Impromptu—His Eccentricities—Début of Young Charles.

**D**URING nearly eighty years the name of Charles Mathews was one of the foremost in our dramatic annals; it was as familiar to our fathers and grandfathers as it is to us, and the youth of this generation will carry into the next remembrances of "the evergreen Charles" who still, at the age of seventy-three, remained the inimitable comedian, and alas! seemingly, for us at least, the last of his race. Not, however, with the younger but the elder owner of the old familiar name has this chapter to do.

Charles Mathews, the elder, then, to begin in the

orthodox manner, was born at No. 18, Strand, on the 28th of June, 1776. The house has long since disappeared, it stood in front of the old Hungerford Market, and consequently upon a part of the ground now occupied by the Charing Cross Railway Station. His father was what he calls "a serious bookseller," that is to say, he dealt only in religious works, and was a very serious man, being minister of a Lady Huntingdon's Chapel at Whetstone. He and his wife appear, however, to have been very worthy personages, although surrounded by a horde of ignorant, hypocritical, and grasping fanatics. Mathews, in the fragment of autobiography which precedes his wife's Memoirs, gives some laughable pictures of these ranters, and tells us that from eight to thirteen he was as gloomy a little bigot as any of them; that he listened with great satisfaction to the denunciations of perdition which made up their sermons, and devoutly hoped it might be the doom of everybody who differed from him and his fraternity.

He tells us, in that same fragment, that his talent for mimicry was manifested at a very early age, that he "had an irresistible impulse to echo, like the mocking-bird, every sound he heard." His imitation of a noted street vendor of eels procured him such a thrashing, when he was about ten years of age, that he felt the effects of it for several weeks afterwards.

After receiving the rudiments of education at St. Martin's Free School, he was removed to Merchant Taylors'. His description of the pedagogues of that establishment is almost as graphic as Lamb's picture of Christ Church about the same period. "Bishop, the head-master, wore a huge powdered wig, larger than any other bishop's wig. It invited invasion, and we shot paper darts with such singular dexterity into the protruding bush behind, that it looked 'like a fretful porcupine.' He had chalk-stone knuckles, too, which he used to rap on my head like a bag of marbles, and, eccentric as it may appear, pinching was his favourite amusement, which he brought to great perfection. There were six forms; I entered the school at the lowest, and got no higher than the fifth, but was, of course, alternately under the tuition of the four masters. Gardner, the lowest in grade, was the only mild person amongst them. Two more cruel tyrants than Bishop and Rose never existed. Lord, the fourth master, was rather an invalid, and, I believe, had been prescribed gentle exercise; he therefore put up for, and was the successful candidate for the flogging department. Rose was so great an adept at the cane, that I once saw a boy strip, after a thrashing from him, that he might expose his barbarous cruelty, when the back was actually striped with dark streaks like a zebra."

Only the classical tongues were taught at Mer-

chant Taylors', and he attended the French Classes of that same Madame Coterille, described in the last chapter.

It must be supposed that our hero's youthful fanaticism was wearing off, as, like Elliston, he joined her amateur performances, and was induced to sustain the part of Phoenix in Philips' "Distressed Mother," and in the next year the Chaplain in Otway's "Orphan." From that time, "Instead of reading 'Brother Hill's Experience of his Sainted Sarah,' or 'The Last Moments of the Pawnbroker's Laundry Maid,' or other such tracts, from my father's shelves, I selected the beauties of the living dramatists which nestled unheeded amongst the great mass of sermons and theological works. They heated my imagination, and, together with the lessons in the French nursery, gave me the most ardent desire to witness a play. On every occasion of my father's absence, instead of standing behind the counter, I mounted upon it, and with a round ruler for a truncheon, red ink for blood, the kitchen-poker for a sword, and a towering goose feather fixed on one side of my hat, turned up for the purpose, the skirt of my coat thrown gracefully over my left shoulder for a mantle, and a red tape garter encircling my knee, did I exhibit myself to the great edification of his apprentices. . . . I could scarcely walk the streets without offering my kingdom for a horse to every pedestrian I met. At

night I could not rest, Macbeth did indeed murder sleep, and I recited Lear up three pairs of stairs to a four-legged bedstead."

Private theatricals followed, as a matter of course ; these were given in a loft over a stable in Short's Gardens, Drury Lane, where he met Charles Young. Afterwards he and a young gentleman, named Litchfield, paid fifteen guineas to be allowed to act "Richard the Third" at Richmond, and fought such a tremendous combat, in consequence of Richard, proud of his swordmanship, declining to be killed, that the house loudly demanded the tyrant's death.

His first regular engagement was at Dublin, where he had a very good taste of the miseries of the calling he had chosen. The manager was impecunious, and salaries were seldom forthcoming. More than once our aspirant passed a couple of days without food, but all the while studying, with undiminished enthusiasm, parts which he might never be called upon to play. He burned for low comedy, but was cast for walking gentlemen. He was at the time a lanky boy of seventeen ; he had been subject to fits as an infant, and these had distorted his features. "The off-side of my mouth took such an affection for my ear," he says, "that it seems to have made a perpetual struggle to form a closer communication with it, and one eyebrow became fixed as a rusty weathercock, while the other popped an inch apparently beyond its proper posi-

tion." Lewis, the comedian, described him as the tallest man in the world (he was only five feet ten, however), and the funniest, with no regular mouth, but speaking from a little hole in the cheek! The celebrated Miss Farren came to star at Dublin, and he was cast for her lover, a sentimental spoon, in the now-forgotten comedy of the "Citizen." For this part he describes himself as being dressed in a scarlet coat made for a man a head shorter than himself, the sleeves reaching only within an inch of his wrists, a yellow embroidered waistcoat, a pair of black satin breeches, scarcely covering the knee, and showing a leg guiltless of calf, powdered hair, tied in a queue, and a *chapeau bras* which he scarcely knew what to do with. When he came before the audience, there was a general shout as though a clown had made his appearance. "Oh! see the mopstick!" "Ah, Pat, hould your breath, or you'll puff him off the stage." "Oh, the creethure! what a slice of a man!" "Arrah where's your other half? Why didn't ye bring it with you, my jewel?" Such were a few of his greetings from the gallery. When he made his exit, he was followed by a universal "Whoo!" Then a voice cried out, "A groan for the long lobster!" which was given with great emphasis.

His next engagement was at Swansea, where he married his first wife. There was a touch of romance in this marriage. The young lady was a

Miss Strong, the daughter of an Exeter physician, who, at his death, had left his family in embarrassed circumstances. She was at the time supporting herself by keeping a school. They met at the house of a mutual friend, and formed an acquaintance. One day he paid her a visit, and, in a moment of confidence, she told him her history; the sadness of the story and the loneliness of her situation so affected him, that in the impulse of the moment, without ever having experienced any affection for her, he offered to make her his wife; she accepted him. When calm reflection came, his matrimonial prospects looked anything but exhilarating; his weekly salary was the munificent sum of twelve shillings, with a benefit chance—a somewhat small income to take a wife upon. However, he was too much a gentleman to retract, and in a very short time Miss Strong became Mrs. Mathews. She had a taste for literature, and endeavoured to add to their scanty means by her pen; at first she concealed this occupation from her husband, working when he was absent or asleep, hoping to give him an agreeable surprise. She wrote two or three novels of the sickly sentimental type then prevalent; they were published, but the remuneration was insignificantly small. This sedentary labour preyed upon a constitution naturally delicate, and threw her into a consumption. In the company in which Mathews was then acting was a young lady for whom his wife had formed a

great attachment; on her death-bed she implored him to take this actress for his second wife; and, although the bride thus strangely selected at first declared such a match to be impossible, before a twelvemonth had elapsed she fulfilled the wish of her dying friend, and became the second Mrs. Mathews. This, however, was in 1802, and we have arrived only as far as 1797 at present.

Upon leaving Swansea he joined Tate Wilkinson, under whom his salary rose to £1 a week! Yet it was a great step in his profession, both as regarded money and position, for the York circuit stood high among provincial theatres. His first reception was not encouraging. "Ugh, what a maypole!" exclaimed Tate. "Sir, you are too tall for low comedy. I never saw anything so thin to be *alive*. Why, sir, one hiss would blow you off the stage!" He ended by advising him to return to his father and "an honest trade," and it was with difficulty he could be prevailed upon to give him a trial. The prejudice was formed, however, and was not easy to overcome. After seeing him play one or two parts, he engaged another comedian, and cast him for very inferior business. This drew forth a remonstrance from the young aspirant, which was answered by a quaint and characteristic letter of Wilkinson's, in which he averred that "misfortune" placed an insurmountable barrier to the possibility of his ever being capable of sustaining the first line of comic

business. Before very long, however, he had to recall this judgment, which he did in a very handsome manner, by apologising upon the stage before the whole company, and raising his salary five shillings a week.

"When I came here," writes Mathews to his friend Litchfield, "Wilkinson thought I should never make an actor; certainly he saw me frequently to disadvantage. Now he is proud of reading his recantation. He told Mrs. Chapman that I was the most promising young man he ever remembers to have had, the most perfect and attentive to dress, and the greatest favourite he has had for many years, particularly in York. He told Stephen Kemble, who played here four nights, and values himself much on Falstaff, that I played it better—that he wanted humour. I have had the second best benefit here (York), £96 15s."

The circuit consisted of York, Leeds, Hull, Wakefield, Pontefract, and Doncaster. Leeds was at this time, he tells us, considered little better than the Botany Bay of actors:—

"The extraordinary, nay, frightful, prejudice cherished by the people made this periodical stay among them a matter of serious dread, especially to the females of the theatre. It appeared as if even the lives of the performers were held in no consideration among a certain portion of the natives, whose estimation of 'lakers' seemed to agree with

ours in relation to the most insignificant animals created for our use. These people carried their opinions still farther, for they deemed it no sin to torture or even destroy any of the profession. If an actress had occasion to cross a certain bridge at a period of the day when the croppers were sunning themselves, in other words, taking their lounge between their working hours, she was obliged to provide herself with an escort to protect her from the rough jokes and assaults of even the most gallant, whose kindness was as much dreaded as their brutalities."

He relates several anecdotes of this persecution. Mr. Holman, preferring to dress for the performance at home, was one night, attired as Lord Townley, being conveyed over the bridge in a sedan-chair, when the novelty of the vehicle attracted the attention of the loungers; they stopped it, and insisted upon seeing who was inside. "A mon wi' his face painted! It's a laker!" was the cry, followed by another of "Toss him o'er t'brig." And, but for the timely appearance of several gentlemen who interfered, they would have carried their threat into execution. But, as the actor was being carried away, he heard one of the ruffians growl, "Well, I'm vexed we didn't topple him into t' water. Where'd been t' harm i' drowning a laker?" On another occasion, a young actress, dressed in the prevailing fashion of the day—scanty petticoats,

and very little of them—was walking by the side of the canal, when she was suddenly caught up in the arms of “an enormous man-monster, of a stone-blue colour from head to foot, dress and complexion,” who declared he “wad na’ gi’ her till she told him wha she was wi’ sooch few claithes on.” She told him she belonged to the theatre. “Ah, a laker! here, here, come hither, I tell thee aw’ve gotten a laker!” he shouted to his companions, who were dressing cloth at a distance. All left their occupation and came running towards the unfortunate girl with as much excitement as though she had been some rare monster. Then, after grossly insulting her, they enveloped her in sheets of wet brown paper, which they were using in their business, until she looked like a mummy, and drove her towards the town, chasing her with savage yells of delight, until she was met by some human beings who rescued her.

At Pontefract, Doncaster, and Hull, however, to be a “laker” was to everywhere insure a welcome.

Mathews’ rise was now rapid, and the fame of his talents reached London. Colman engaged him for the Haymarket at £10 per week and benefit terms. He made his first appearance on the London stage on the 15th of May, 1802, as Jabel, in Cumberland’s play of “The Jew,” and Lingo, in O’Keefe’s “Agreeable Surprise.” His success was

immediate and unqualified, both with the press and the public.

Prosperity is prosy; there is no romance in respectability, and the man who has no trouble to gain his daily bread, and who pays punctually his rent and taxes, is seldom interesting in a literary point of view. This is especially the case with actors; in their struggling days, when they have to resort to a thousand shifts to gain food and shelter, and their whole existence is a *contre-temps*, they are the most delightful people to read about; but settled prosperously in a London engagement—why, you might as well attempt to extract amusement out of the life of an alderman.

I must pause to chronicle one event, the birth of his son Charles, which took place in Liverpool, where his father was fulfilling an engagement after the Haymarket season, in December, 1803. In the next year, our comedian was engaged at Drury Lane to supply Suett's place during an illness. For several years he alternated between Drury Lane, the Haymarket, and provincial starring engagements; growing in fame and position, mixing in the best society, courted, sought after, lionised. He was an especial favourite and personal friend of Scott's, and could boast of being his companion on his first visit to the ruins of Kenilworth. On the day he left London to fulfill some engagement in Yorkshire (1815), Scott called at his house and invited

him to dine with him and Byron at Long's, and proposed to be the companion of his journey to Warwick and Kenilworth, which he then greatly desired to see. And so it was arranged and carried out.

It was in 1814, while in company with Terry, the actor, Scott's friend and *protégé*, that he was thrown from a tilbury; the accident, which was a serious one, produced a long illness and a life-long lameness. Mrs. Mathews relates how he amused himself during his long confinement to his bed, with his violin, welcoming his friends with the scrape of a blind fiddler, and how he mastered the mysteries of a jew's harp and a penny trumpet, becoming a proficient performer on both.

In 1818, he commenced at the Lyceum Theatre that marvellous entertainment, with which his name is far more associated than with the regular drama, and in which, during the following sixteen years, he delighted England and America by the exhibition of such powers of mimicry and personation as have never been equalled before and since.

The cause of his secession from the dramatic stage he gave in his opening address:—"I have been frequently urged by my friends to attempt an entertainment by myself, and reminded with what success the celebrated Dibdin had, during several winters, kept audiences together by his single exertions. Still I preferred the exercise of my pro-

fession as a member of the national theatre; and could I have been indulged in the first wish of my heart, that of frequently appearing before you in the characters of legitimate comedy, in that capacity I should probably have remained to the end of my days, without ever attempting to exhibit that little knack for distinct mimicry to which I have since unfortunately been exclusively doomed. . . . The press, perhaps unconsciously, took its tone from the managers; and a part (I do not say the whole, for I should be ungrateful if I did), but a part fell into the habit of designing me as a mere mimic."

The first announcement ran as follows:—"The public are respectfully informed that Mr. Mathews will be At Home at the English Opera House on the 2nd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 9th, and 11th of April. Particulars of the Entertainment, to which the public are invited, will be duly announced."

He engaged himself to Arnold, the manager of the Lyceum, for seven years at a salary of £1000 per year. The success of the entertainment far exceeded the most sanguine expectations, and Mathews soon repented of his bargain. Mrs. Mathews, in her biography, animadverted against it so strongly as to draw forth a pamphlet from Arnold, who defended himself on the plea that, independent of the salary, he undertook a risk of £3,500 a year for expenses upon an untried specula-

tion, the failure of which would have been most disastrous to him, and that, therefore, it was but right he should reap the greater share of the advantages. Modifications, however, were afterwards made which enabled Mathews to clear large sums by his provincial tours.

Mrs. Mathews relates some extraordinary anecdotes of her husband's powers of personation off the stage, which were so marvellous that he could without change of dress assume a character so completely as to deceive his most intimate friends. The personage thus assumed went by the name of Mr. Pennyman; once he was expelled from behind the scenes of the Liverpool Theatre, where he was acting at the time, as an intrusive stranger. More than once he played off the same trick in the green-room of Drury Lane amidst his brother actors, without his identity being suspected. Indeed the eccentricities of this suppositious gentleman became so celebrated that one night the Duchess of Devonshire came from her box into the green-room to have a peep at him. He sat down beside her, entered into conversation, complimented her upon her beauty, while she was all the time convulsed with laughter. No one knew who he was or whence he came, but as the *habitués* of the theatre had the *entrée* of the green-room at that time, a stranger more or less was not remarkable. As no gentleman, unless he was performing in the play, was

permitted to enter the green-room except in evening dress, the costume afforded no guide to his detection. "No one," to continue in the writer's words, "could tell how the gentleman got admittance, and therefore there was no mode of excluding him. Every night he attracted inconvenient numbers to the green-room; and on the nights when my husband performed, it was a matter of much regret to the performers that 'Mathews always came to the theatre too early or too late to see a subject whom he of all others ought to see.' It was really surprising that no suspicion arose of the truth. How long this imposture lasted I forget, but it was at length revealed by the impostor himself. One night, in the midst of a greater excitement than was usually created by him, he suddenly stood before the assembled crowd as Mr. Mathews. A set of village clowns, or a group of children gazing at a mountebank at a fair, could not have expressed more wonder, nay, something approaching to terror, when the imperceptible change took place, than was manifested in the features of all around."

When Godwin was writing "Cloudesly" he sent Mathews the following letter:—"My dear Sir, I am at this moment engaged in writing a work of fiction, a part of the incidents of which will consist in escapes in disguises. It has forcibly struck me that if I could be indulged in the pleasure of

half an hour's conversation with you upon the subject, it would furnish me with some hints, &c., &c."

A day was appointed for him to dine at Mathews' house, and the great mimic gave him several ocular demonstrations of the possibilities of disguise. By-and-by, while Godwin was wrapt "in the wonder on't," Mathews left the room, and almost immediately afterwards there entered an eccentric gentleman, a neighbour. "We were embarrassed," to continue in Mrs. Mathews' words, "and Mr. Godwin evidently vexed at the interruption. However, there was no help for it, the servant had admitted him, and he was introduced in form to Mr. Godwin. The moment Mr. Jenkins, for such was his name, discovered the distinguished person he had dropped in upon, he was enthusiastically pleased at the event, talked to Mr. Godwin about all his works, inquired about the forthcoming book—in fact bored him through and through. At last the author turned to my husband for refuge, and discovered that he had left the room. He therefore rose from his seat and approached the window leading to the lawn, Mr. Jenkins officiously following, and insisting upon opening it for him, and while he was urging a provokingly obstinate lock, the object of his devoted attention waited behind him for release. The casement at length flew open, and Mr. Godwin passing the gentleman with a devoted look of thanks, found to his astonishment that Mr. Jenkins had

disappeared, and that Mr. Mathews stood in his place."

In "Love, Law, and Physic," in the part of Lubin Log, he had to give a description of a trial. When he came to the summing-up, he assumed a marvellous imitation of Lord Ellenborough's manner; the effect upon the audience was so great and the applause so overpowering, that he was quite disconcerted. The next day a nobleman waited upon him with a polite request that it should not be repeated. Unlike Foote, Mathews was very averse to give personal offence, and promised not to do so. The next evening the house was crowded, and all the audience on tiptoe of expectation for the *bonne bouche*. The address, however, being given in quite a different style, there arose a clamour and cries of "Imitation." For a time the actor took no notice of the demand, until the cries for an explanation—for the impression was that it had been forbidden by a superior authority—became so loud that it was impossible to disregard them. He then signified that his speech upon the previous night having given much offence, he was determined not to repeat it, but that he would, if they sanctioned the experiment, give the speech in question in various tones and differences of style, which would enable them to point out which they preferred. He then proceeded to deliver the charge in imitation of Kemble, Cooke, Incledon, Suett, Munden, and

Blanchard. Soon afterwards he received a request to visit Carlton House; upon arriving there he was ushered into the presence of the Prince and the Duke of York, and about twenty ladies and gentlemen. The Prince desired him to give the imitation of Ellenborough, of which he had heard so much. Of course, although reluctantly, he was compelled to comply. The Prince was in raptures, shutting his eyes while he listened in intense enjoyment, and exclaiming, "Excellent! perfect! it is he himself." He afterwards received another request to visit Carlton House, to entertain the Court with some specimens of his "rare talent," and was treated by the Regent, not only graciously but cordially. Previous to this, at a dinner at some great house, he had seated him between himself and Sheridan at table, inconveniently squeezing himself for the purpose.

Very droll is Angelo's description of Mathews imitating fireworks: "After tucking up his coat, he began gently turning round, whirling and hissing, and as the changes took place he made a pop with his hands, sometimes extending his arms, at others placing them akimbo, wheeling round on one leg whilst kicking out with the other, with different imitations of sound."

This was the age of hoaxes and practical jokes, and in his youthful days Mathews perpetrated a hoax almost as daring as Hook's Berners Street

affair. He and some friends were in the habit in summer of making pleasure-trips to different places near London. At the time of the excitement about Ferdinand of Spain it occurred to them that Mathews should take an excursion as the Spanish Ambassador. His "suite" was disposed in two carriages; Hill, the proprietor of the *Monthly Mirror*, acted the part of interpreter. They halted at Woolwich, where his "Excellency" sallied out on foot to view the place; he was dressed in a bright green frock coat, covered with ribbons and orders, and wore an enormous cocked hat with "Viva Ferdinand" stamped in gold letters upon a purple ribbon; of course he was followed and loudly cheered by all the little boys; he went into shops, bought various articles, speaking a wonderful jargon, which his interpreter translated. By-and-by there came a message from the Arsenal, that it was open to his Excellency's inspection, and that all the *employés* were at his command, an offer of which the party had the impudence to avail themselves. At the inn, where they dined, the scene was most ludicrous; the landlord and his satellites were tricked out in their best, the whole neighbourhood was ransacked for plate to adorn the table. The interpreter informed the landlord that his Excellency required everything in great profusion—vast numbers of spoons, forks, and plates. His bedchamber was an illumination of wax candles, and twelve dozen

towels were placed for his use. Everything he did and required was the reverse of ordinary rules. Next morning they went for a water excursion on board a fishing-boat. The master was greatly astonished by the doings of his distinguished passenger. Amongst various other refreshments he was shown a large can of lamp-oil for his Excellency's exclusive drinking, and was equally disgusted when he saw him devour what he believed to be a candle-end, but which was really only a piece of apple cut into that form, and wash it down with what he was told was a glass of lamp-oil.

In 1822-3 he visited America with his "*At Home*," and his success was as great as it had been in England. Upon his return, he appeared at Drury Lane, for the first time for six years as an actor. In 1827 he again played there, receiving the highest terms, so his wife informs us, that up to that time had been paid to any comic actor. The next year he became Yates's partner at the Adelphi. In 1829 the "*At Home*" was transferred to that house, Yates assisting in the personations. Notwithstanding his success, and the large amount of money he made, his circumstances seem to have been not at all prosperous during his latter years; he had embarked in several speculations, all of which failed, sweeping away fortune with them, and obliging him to give up his house in Milfield Lane, Highgate

West Hill,\* “their earthly paradise,” as Mrs. Mathews styles it. This was a great blow to him. But a yet greater was the sale of his magnificent collection of theatrical portraits, some 400 in number, which he had accumulated at great cost, and the greater part of which now adorns the Garrick Club. In 1834 he paid a second visit to America, where, notwithstanding a factious opposition, attempted against him on account of his ridicule of national peculiarities in one of his London entertainments, he was received with the greatest enthusiasm.

From the time of his accident he had been a great sufferer from lameness, and his health had been gradually failing for several years. Upon his return from the United States it broke down altogether. He died in Plymouth on his fifty-ninth birthday, that is to say, on the 28th of June, 1835, and was buried in St. Andrew’s Church, in that town.

In regard to the merits of his acting, we cannot do better than quote Leigh Hunt’s description of his performance of Sir Fretful Plagiary in “The Critic:”

“We are generally satisfied when an actor can express a single feeling with strength of countenance; but to express two at once, and to give them at the same time a powerful distinctness, belongs to

\* The house is still standing, though it has been altered into a pretentious building and is called “Milfield Hall;” from the ponds, however, a glimpse of the older part may still be obtained.

the perfection of his art. Nothing can be more admirable than the look of Mr. Mathews when the severe criticism is detailed by his malicious acquaintance. While he affected a pleasantry of countenance, he cannot help betraying his rage in his eyes, in that feature which always betrays our most predominant feeling; if he draws the air to and fro between his teeth, as if he was perfectly assured of his own pleasant feelings, he convinces everybody by his tremulous and restless limbs that he is in absolute torture; if the lower part of his face expands into a painful smile, the upper contracts into a glaring frown which contradicts the ineffectual good-humour beneath; everything in his face becomes rigid, confused, and uneasy; it is a mixture of oil and vinegar, in which the acid predominates; it is anger putting on a mask that is only the more hideous in proportion as it is more fantastic. The sudden drop of his smile into a deep and bitter indignation, when he can endure sarcasm no longer, completes this impassioned picture of Sir Fretful; but, lest his indignation should swell into mere tragedy, Mr. Mathews accompanies it with all the touches of familiar vexation; while he is venting his rage in vehement expressions, he accompanies his more emphatic words with a closing thrust of his buttons, which he fastens and unfastens up and down his coat; and when his obnoxious friend approaches his snuff-box to take a pinch, he claps

down the lid, and turns violently off, with a most malicious grin of mockery."

The same admirable critic descants also upon his fine personations of age:—"Mathews never appears to wish to be old; time seems to have come to him, not he to time, and as he never, where he can avoid it, makes that show of feebleness which the vanity of age always would avoid, so he never forgets that general appearance of years which the natural feebleness of age could not help." He then goes on to describe his marvellous discrimination of various kinds of old men, but I have not space to quote further.

Coleridge, who was a frequent visitor at Ivy Cottage, and was very fond of Mathews, called him a comic poet, acting his own poems. He wrote the following impromptu after witnessing the "At Home:"

"If in whatever decks this earthly ball,  
'Tis still great mother Nature *one in all*,  
Hence Mathews needs must be her genuine son,  
A second Nature that acts *all in one*!"

Among his other abilities was a prodigious memory. He could play a part after fifteen years without looking at the book, and during the sixteen years he gave the "At Homes," he never had a prompter or used a single memorandum for the night's entertainment.

His temperament was exceedingly restless and

irritable, and his eccentricities were very notable. Although so full of wit and drollery in company, in private life he was intensely melancholy, and suffered at times under such depression of spirits that it was necessary to put away his razors, lest he should commit suicide. He was so fond of light, that he could not endure a blind to be lowered on the most blazing summer's day, and when he went out to dine, he always carried a pair of silver snuffers in his pocket to trim the candles with. If he saw a picture hung crooked in a strange house, he could not rest until he had adjusted it. He could not endure the touch of money, he said it made his flesh "goosey." He would fall into a frantic passion if a housemaid removed a pair of dirty stockings, which he had thrown down in the middle of his bed-room as a remembrancer, as people tie cotton round their fingers. Having an appointment at a city tavern one day, he was shown into the commercial room, where a traveller was regaling himself upon boiled beef. Casting his eyes upon the table, he observed he was not using mustard, this put him into a fidget. He took up a newspaper and tried to read, but spite of him his eyes would wander in the direction of that mustardless plate. At length he could endure it no longer. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said in his mildest accents, "I don't think you are aware that you have no mustard?" The man stared, nodded, and went on

with his meal. Mathews again took up the newspaper; but again the abnormal sight irritated him beyond endurance, and advancing to the table and slapping it with his hand, he called out sharply, "Are—you—aware,—sir, that you are eating beef without mustard?" Again the man stared without deigning a reply. This was more than Mathews could stand. Rushing to the side-board, he snatched up a mustard pot, and clapped it down in front of him with, "By——, you SHALL take mustard!" But he did not, and Mathews in a towering passion summoned the waiter, and desired to be shown into another room, remarking that he had never been in the company of such a disgusting savage before, and that he was quite sick at the revolting sight. Like all mimics he could not endure the thought of being imitated himself. He was shy too, and had a morbid dislike to be lionized, or in any way rendered conspicuous. He was very fond of animals; if he found any straying about at night, he would give them a shelter. A curious story of this love is told in some "Reminiscences;" I give it in the writer's own words:—"I happened to be in Bath once when he was giving his 'At Home' there. As we were walking along one of the principal streets one morning, a noble Newfoundland dog was sitting sedately bolt upright at a door we had to pass. As soon as we got opposite the dog, Mathews stopped short, went to the edge of the

pavement, took off his hat, made a low bow to the evidently astonished animal, and then passed on without saying a word. ‘Do you know him?’ said I, ‘that you salute him in that fashion?’ ‘No,’ he replied, ‘but I have a profound respect for a dog like that, and I generally show it in the way you have seen.’ ”

His friend Wightwick, writing of his private character, says:—“I knew him as a man; you, perhaps, only as an actor. I had opportunities of observing his scrupulous integrity; his affectionate and grateful attachment to those who loved him; his forgiving generosity towards those who had wronged him; and, more than all, his Christian resignation when threatened by the death which has since laid him low. And now, adieu for ever! Adieu, Charles Mathews! For the many hours of innocent and instructive amusement thou hast afforded, we proffer our gratitude; for thy purity of mind and unsullied integrity, our admiration; for thy warmth of heart, our love; for thy loss, our deep sorrow.”

In the December of the year of his father’s death, young Charles made his first bow to the public at the Olympic, with Liston, in the “Old and Young Stager,” written for the occasion by Lemman Rede, and in a piece of his own composition, entitled “The Hunchbacked Lover.” It had been the wish of his father that he should take to the stage, as he be-

lieved, and rightly, as it proved, that he had great abilities for that calling; but the young man was too attached to his own profession—architecture—to do so until, it may be presumed, the embarrassed position of himself and mother compelled him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SOME MORE FAMOUS COMEDIANS.

Joseph Munden—His Wonderful Faces—His Early Shifts and Poverty — His Penuriousness — Dowton—John Emery — His Great Acting as Tyke—Two Rustics—John Liston—Lack of Comic Power in his Early Years—An Usher—Love of Tragic Parts—As Octavian and Romeo—Melancholy Last Days—The Man of One Story and the Persian Ambassador—The Man who did not like Tripe—Love of Fun among the Old Actors.

THERE is something rich and unctuous in the very sound of the name MUNDEN. Some critics of his time severely censure his love of grimace; there is no doubt his style had a breadth which frequently degenerated into great exaggeration. But, according to Elia, and what authority can weigh against his upon such a subject? he must have been a marvellous comedian. “There is one face of Farley, one face of Knight, one (and what a one it is) of Liston: but Munden has none that you can properly pin down, and call *his*. When you think he has exhausted his battery of looks, in un-

accountable warfare with your gravity, suddenly he spouts out an entirely new set of features. Like Hydra, he is not one, but legion; not so much a comedian as a company. If his name could be multiplied like his countenance, it might fill a playbill. He, and he alone, literally *makes faces*: applied to any other person the phrase is a mere figure, denoting certain modifications of the human countenance. Out of some invisible wardrobe he dips for faces as his friend Suett used for wigs, and fetches them out as easily." Yet another writer tells us that he had no singularity of features, which in repose were as sedate as those of a merchant or a baronet, though at his will they could assume the most fantastic forms. "Any one of his hundred faces might have served as the model of a mask for the old Greek comedy; and looked as immovable while it lasted." He had wonderful skill in portraying drunkenness. "We have seen him," says Boaden, "play three drunken parts in a night, and come out fresh in them all: and such was his practical discrimination that we could not have transferred a tone or a stagger without injury to the inebriate sarcasms of Crack, the maudlin philanthropy of Nipperton, or the sublime stupidity of Doxey." Those who have witnessed Mr. Webster's performance of Richard Pride, in each act of which he was in a different state of drunkenness, may realize something of this description.

Munden, born in 1758, was the son of a poulterer and pork-butcher in Brookes' Market, Leather Lane. He began life in an apothecary's shop, then entered an attorney's office as clerk. But constant visits to the theatre fired him with an ambition that soared above his three-legged stool, and he left home and joined a strolling company. Few men had more bitter experience of a country-player's life than Joseph Munden: starvation was his chronic condition. Once he was driven to such extremity that he prevailed upon a militia man, whom he met upon the road, to take him to the inn at which he was billeted and pass him off for a comrade, to procure him a supper and bed. For this favour it was expected that he would enrol himself in the regiment, but early the next morning Joseph was *non est inventus*. He quitted the profession for two years and returned to his stool, but while its trials were forgotten its glamour would not let him rest, and again pen and parchment were renounced for the sock and buskin. Step by step he fought his way up the difficult path he had chosen, until he made his first appearance at Covent Garden, in 1790, as Sir Francis Gripe and Jemmy Jumps, and, although the latter was one of Edwin's most famous parts, he scored a decided success. Old Dornton in "The Road to Ruin" was his first great original part, and it at once raised him to the first rank of his profession. His last appearance was in 1824. He

had always been penurious in his habits; but in his latter years, although possessed of ample means, he deprived himself almost of the necessaries of life. He died in 1832, and was buried in St. George's, Bloomsbury.

DOWTON was an Exeter man, born in 1766. He was intended for an architect. He made his London *début* at Drury Lane in 1795 as Sheva in "The Jew." Leigh Hunt pronounced him one of the finest comic geniuses the stage ever produced. He never resorted to trickery or grimace to gain applause: he was a thorough artist, who followed the tradition of the Garrick school, and approached very near to King in versatility. Planché says he was the best Falstaff he had ever seen.

JOHN EMERY, the greatest of stage countrymen, was equally at home in every species of rustic—the serious, the comic, the tragi-comic; his powers of discrimination in these characters were wonderful. In Tyke ("The School of Reform") "he astonished the town," says Leigh Hunt, "by a display of feeling and passion almost amounting to the most thrilling tragedy. . . . It is in the scene where he describes the agony of his old father, as he stood upon the beach to witness his son's transportation, that he surprised us with this tragic originality. His description of their last adieu, of his parent kneeling to bless him just as the vessel was moving, of his own despair, the blood that seemed to burst from

his eyes, and his fall of senselessness to the ground, was given with so unexpected an elevation of manner, so wild an air of wretchedness, and with action of such pitiable self-abhorrence, that, in spite of his country dialect, which he still very naturally preserved, and the utter vulgarity of his personal appearance, the audience on the first night were electrified for the moment with the truest terror and pity. His haggard demeanour and outcry of despair live before me at this instant." The same fine critic also highly praises his Caliban: "In this character he again approaches to terrific tragedy, when he describes the various tortures inflicted on him by the magician and the surrounding snakes, that 'stare and kiss him into madness.' This idea, which is truly the 'fine fancy' of the poet, is brought before the spectators with all the loathing and violence of desperate wretchedness."

Emery was a native of Durham, not a Yorkshire man, although he was brought up in the latter county. "He was so perfect a representative of the loutish cunning of the three Ridings," says Boaden, "that it was difficult to believe that he had, or could have, any personal or mental qualities to discriminate the man from the actor." His rustics were not stage personations; look, action, manner, dress, speech, were all of the very persons he represented. He was a musician, a draughtsman, and painted skilfully in oil. At twelve years old he played the violin in

the Brighton orchestra, but soon exchanged that for the boards. When only fifteen, he was admirable in his delineation of old age, and Tate Wilkinson spoke of him then as a "great" actor. In 1797, when only twenty years old, Harris engaged him for three years, to supply Quick's place. He died rather suddenly in 1822. Much of his talent descended to that son who at present represents his name.

"If our two stage rustics," writes Leigh Hunt, "Emery and Liston, are compared, it will be found that the former is more skilled in the habits and cunning of rusticity, and the latter in its simplicity and ignorance. Emery has appropriated to himself the dialects and the personal peculiarities of countrymen; Liston is the rustic merely because nothing so ignorant and so gaping is ever discovered in town. Emery excels in vain insolence, in the fatigue of comprehending another, and in the meditation of a cunning answer; Liston in the apparent inability to object, in a hopelessness of perception, and in the fatuity of mere astonishment. Their expression of vanity is in proportion to their expression of ignorance; what is the affectation of superiority in Emery, becomes an important self-conviction in Liston. Emery, full of whim and artifice, is the countryman who has associated with the geniuses of inns, and has preserved his rusticity and his ignorance after acquiring a contempt for both; Liston is the confirmed, inexperienced, and stupid bump-

kin, with all the prejudices of unvaried locality, and with not even sufficient intelligence to imbibe the manner and eccentricities of his neighbours. Upon the whole, Liston is more dry in his humour, more effective with a little exertion and upon inefficient subjects, and altogether more unaffected; but the greater genius must certainly be allowed to Emery, who exhibits a more discriminative minuteness and variety of expression, and who excels at once in the habits and the passions of the country."

Mathews' successor at York was "*a* MR. LISTON, who soon afterwards became *the* Mr. Liston." Strange to say, he made little or no impression there, and Mathews, who played with him before his departure, tells us he never once made him smile, and that when Colman, at the time he was negotiating with Liston for the Haymarket, asked his opinion of his acting, he felt embarrassed, and could only reply that he was a very gentlemanlike young man, of whom he had not seen enough to be a judge of his powers.

"What little we know of Mr. Liston," writes Mrs. Mathews, "impressed us with the notion of his inveterate gravity, both on and off the stage. On the night of his first appearance (1805), therefore, when he played Sheepface to Mr. Mathews' Scout, in 'The Village Lawyer,' his acting in the first scene took my husband by surprise, and so convulsed him with laughter, that he was scarcely

able to utter a word of his own character intelligibly while he was on the stage with him."

He was born in 1777, and in his early youth was usher at St. Martin's School, in Castle Street, Leicester Square. But the footlights lured him from desk and stool, and believing himself born to represent dramatic heroes, he joined a strolling company as a tragedian. As might be expected, he was not very successful in that line, and, disgusted with his adopted profession, endeavoured to obtain the situation of clerk in a printing-office. Happily his negotiations failed. We next find him at Dublin, and then at Newcastle, under Stephen Kemble, still playing tragedy. It was the last-named manager who cleverly discovering the true bent of his genius, cast him for comedy parts, and made his fortune. But he never wholly cast off his first love, and never could entirely divest himself of the idea that it was the true one. Long after he had taken his position as one of the greatest comic geniuses of his time, when only the sight of his face was enough to set the house in a roar, he would occasionally play a tragic part for his benefit, such as Octavian, and once he performed Romeo! Like Suett, he was a martyr to a nervous complaint, and the cause in both was probably identical, since I have heard from those who knew him, that he would drink a bottle of brandy during a night's performance. He did not act after the season of 1836-7.

His sole occupation during the last years of his life was to stand at a window of his house, which faced Hyde Park Corner, and, watch in hand, time the omnibuses as they passed; if any happened to be a little late, he would be in great distress. Finally, his spirits wholly forsook him, and he fell into a lethargic condition. He died in 1846.

Liston was the only comic actor whose salary until then had exceeded that of tragedians. Boaden says he could not define his power. "He must be seen to be comprehended. Other actors labour to be comic; I see nothing like labour or system in Liston. In person, he is stately and even grave in expression. . . . He does not concur in any general effect—he is *alone*, as well when with others on the scene as when he enters to soliloquize, or rather enjoy *himself* with the audience."

I have given some anecdotes of the extraordinary fondness for practical jokes at this period in Mathews' life; there is a capital story of this kind related in regard to Liston. At the Theatrical Fund dinners, which were not the portentous affairs they are now-a-days, but really convivial gatherings of the profession, a constant attendant was an old gentleman who was famous for one story, which it was the delight of certain choice spirits to make him repeat over and over again, and then question him upon the several points, pretending they did not quite understand. Sometimes Simmons and

Munden would get up arguments, pretend to quarrel and fight across the table, upon which the old gentleman, to settle the dispute, was called upon to repeat the same eternal story, perhaps for the tenth time, which he would do quite innocent of the joke. Once Liston slipped out of the room unobserved, and tricked himself and one or two others out in Oriental costume. Then entered one of the masquers to announce that the Persian Ambassador, having been told of this wonderful story, was desirous of hearing it from the narrator's own lips. The victim was delighted, and His Excellency was requested to enter. Then appeared Liston, preceded by salaaming attendants, attired in silk and paste diamonds, with beard and wig, and presenting a figure of most comical and ferocious dignity. The old gentleman once more told his story, to which the mock ambassador listened with the most solemn attention, while all round the table were almost bursting with suppressed laughter. When it was done, His Excellency, through his interpreter, expressed his gratification and thanks, and then departed. Stripping off his disguise, Liston returned to the room and was told of the distinguished visitor who had just left. "I am delighted, sir, to hear," he answered gravely, "that you rendered the story so effective to a person so particularly ignorant of the language." "Yes," rejoined the victim, "and so particularly *ugly*, Mr. Liston."

Liston once came to a juvenile party at Planché's dressed in a red jacket, nankeen trousers, and a pinafore, sucking a lollipop. Passing through Leicester Square one day with Miller, the bookseller, he was descanting with great unction upon the dainty dinner of stewed tripe he was going to partake of. "Beastly stuff," ejaculated Miller. Liston stopped, and in a stentorian voice cried, "What! you don't like tripe?" "No." "You don't like tripe!" again roared Liston. People began to look round and stare. "Hush, for heaven's sake, don't speak so loud," expostulated Miller. But instead of heeding him, the actor turned to the passers-by and, pointing to the unfortunate bookseller, cried, "There's a man who doesn't like tripe." A crowd began to gather, and Miller took to his heels, with Liston's cry ringing in his ears, "There goes the man who doesn't like tripe!"

There was a childlike love of fun about the men of this time, which is as far removed from the dullness of this priggish age, with its *bourgeois* type of respectability, as it was from the fire-eating proclivities of the middle ages. Munden never met Planché in the street without getting astride his umbrella and prancing up to him. Meadows, when he came to visit him, would seat himself on the kerb stone with his hat in his hand like a beggar, and would not move until they threw him out a

halfpenny. When Wallack and Tom Cooke met one another in the street, they would remove *each other's* hats, bow gravely and pass on. Charles Young, the classical tragedian, the associate of nobles, was as fond of practical jokes as any of them. He was always abusing Meadows, who resided at Barnsbury, for living so far from the theatre, and every time they met it was, "Well, Meadows, where do you live now?" One day he was riding towards Regent Street, when he saw the comedian in front of him. Raising his voice (and it was a most powerful organ) he shouted out, "Meadows, where do you live?" "At No. — Belgrave Square," cried out the actor, and quick as lightning disappeared up Jermyn Street, "before," says Planché, to whose "Recollections" I am indebted for this anecdote, "an emphatic impeachment of his veracity rolled like thunder over the heads of the amazed but amused pedestrians from Waterloo Place to Piccadilly." "The last time he called upon me (Planché), he left his card, upon which was inscribed, 'Tis I, my lord, the early village cock!'"

JOHN FAWCETT, OXBERRY, "LITTLE" KNIGHT, BLANCHARD, BARTLEY, JOHN REEVE, would be names worth dwelling upon, did space permit.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE LAST OF THE FAMOUS ACTRESSES.

Miss O'Neill—Her First Chance—Her Exquisite Performance of Juliet—Description of her Acting—Her Marriage—Maria Foote—Her Entanglement with Colonel Berkeley—"Pea Green" Hayne—Public Caprice—Her Marriage—Miss Kelley—Mrs. Glover—Her Sad Domestic Life—Madame Vestris.

THE line of great tragic actresses, which was unbroken from the days of Elizabeth Barry, terminated with MISS O'NEILL. We have had excellent actresses since, to enumerate a few—MISS DUNCAN, afterwards Mrs. Davison, MISS SMITH, MRS. BUNN, MRS. HENRY SIDDONS, MISS HELEN FAUCIT, but none have risen to those superior heights where genius towers above talent. Perhaps even Miss O'Neill scarcely merits a place besides Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Crawford, Mrs. Siddons—her pedestal should be placed a little lower, but still she was of them—one of that glorious band to

which each generation for nearly one hundred and fifty years, added one or more, but of which, it would seem, must now be written—all told.

She was the daughter of an Irish strolling manager, and was brought up to the stage from childhood. What strolling life was in England I have endeavoured to picture in the first chapter of this volume; it was even a harder lot across the Channel. But while still very young, accident rescued her from this life of drudgery and privation. Miss Walstein, the leading lady of the Theatre Royal, Dublin, presuming upon her great popularity, had placed the manager in such a dilemma that it almost necessitated him closing the theatre, when some one suggested Miss O'Neill, who happened to be in the city with her father at the time, as a very clever girl. Glad to snatch at any chance which offered escape, the manager engaged her. As Juliet her success was very great. There she remained, an immense favourite both as a lady and an actress, until John Kemble saw her, offered her an engagement for three years at £15, £16, and £17 a week. Her first appearance at Covent Garden was as Juliet, on October 6th, 1814.

Macready speaks rapturously of her performance. "The charming picture she presented," he says, "was one that time could not fade from my memory. It was not altogether the matchless beauty of form and face, but the spirit of perfect innocence and

purity that seemed to glisten in her speaking eyes and breathe from her chiselled lips." He highly commends her artless unconsciousness, her freedom from affectation, her fervid *Italian* passion in the balcony-scene. "Love was to her life: life not valued if unsustained by love. . . . Throughout my whole experience hers was the only representation of Juliet I have ever seen." Her success was almost a repetition of the Siddons' furore. "Her beauty, grace, simplicity, and tenderness were the theme of every tongue. Crowds were nightly disappointed in finding room in the theatre to witness her enchanting presentations. Juliet, Belvidera, Mrs. Beverley, Mrs. Haller, were again realities upon the scene, attested with enthusiasm by the tears and applauding shouts of admiring thousands."

"In all her acting," says a critic of the day, "she was a very woman. There was little in it of a meditative cast, little of calm, meditative grandeur, yet every look, movement, gesture, and tone was gracefully feminine, her pathos was most irresistible and sweet. Nothing in their kind could exceed the exquisite propriety and modest loveliness of her Mrs. Haller, the conjugal sweetness of her Belvidera, and the womanly heroism of her Evadne. Her Juliet in the early scenes was perhaps too light and playful. The affection, in this

delicious character, is throughout deep, serious, and intense. The passion that is 'boundless as the sea' leaves no time for elegant trifling or graceful coquetry. In the latter scenes Miss O'Neill gave full glorious vent to the tide of love and sorrow. Her highest effort, perhaps, was in portraying of a tremulous and giddy joy, a rapture bordering on frenzy, an inspiration of delight, portentous of sudden and fearful disaster. We never remember to have been more delighted by her acting than when we have seen her in *Isabella*, at the return of Biron, clasp him in wild rapture, forgetting her dreadful condition, gaze on him with eyes lit up with strange fire, and reply to his questions by laughter in which horror and transport mingled. She mistook her powers when she resorted to shrieks, rattlings in the throat, and all the terrors of physical agony. She was worthy to express all the best sympathies and noblest triumphs of her sex. In the delineation of confiding love, of generous rapture, of feminine elevation of soul, she has had no equal within our memory, and can never have a superior." It was said that in tenderness and grief she at least equalled Mrs. Siddons in her first year. But Mrs. Siddons' passion was combined with a lofty imagination and commanding intellect. Miss O'Neill owed everything to extreme sensibility. She gave herself up entirely to the impression of the moment, was borne

along by the tide of passion, and absorbed in suffering.

It was said, however, that, unlike that of Mrs. Siddons, her acting left no permanent impression upon the mind, that its effect passed away with the momentary illusion of the scene. Hazlitt remarks, "her acting is pure nature or passion, and is the prose of tragedy; for the poetry she must lean on the author." During her short professional career she accumulated £30,000, which at her marriage she settled upon her family, which had always been dependent upon her. In 1819 she was married to Mr. Wrixon Beecher, M.P. for Mallow, who afterwards inherited his uncle's baronetcy, she being then a little over thirty years of age; she at once retired into private life. Lady Morgan, writing of her in 1836, says, "The poetry of her voice remains, it is still Juliet's voice in the balcony scene, but all that was poetical in her beauty has gone. She is now a thin, elegant-looking lady, but with no beauty save the indestructible beauty of goodness." She died in 1872 at the age of eighty-one.

There is no actress whose name is more familiar to our ears than that of MARIA FOOTE. She was born in 1798, her father, who claimed to be a descendant from Samuel Foote, had been an officer in the army, and was at the time of her birth manager of the Plymouth Theatre; her mother,

many years Mr. Foote's junior, was a woman of considerable personal attractions and accomplishments. Maria played Juliet when she was only twelve years old, and soon afterwards her father gave up theatrical management and took an hotel at Exeter. But the speculation proved a failure. A borrower and a sponger, not over scrupulous in his transactions, he was not held in much esteem among the Devonshire people. His wife took to the stage, her beauty gathered admirers about her whom she did not very harshly repulse, the husband was indifferent, and—well the atmosphere was not the purest for a young girl to be reared in. In 1814 Maria was engaged for Covent Garden, being then only sixteen years of age, and made her first appearance as Amanthis, in "The Child of Nature." She displayed no very brilliant talent, but a charming face and an elegant figure rendered her attractive in secondary parts. At the end of the season she went "starring" to Cheltenham. It was there she made the acquaintance of Colonel Berkeley, who had a taste for amateur acting and offered his services for her benefit; as he was certain to draw a crowded house his offer, as a matter of course, was accepted. All who are acquainted with the history of that period know the kind of person Colonel Berkeley was, to those who are not, it is sufficient to say he was a boon companion of the Prince Regent. Fascinated by her beauty, he

seduced the young actress under a promise of marriage. She was scarcely seventeen at the time, a mere child in years, and considering her surroundings, must be held wholly blameless in the affair. A hardened *roué* dangling a coronet before her eyes, a scheming father, an intriguing mother, what could she do but fall into the snare? She lived under the Colonel's protection for five years and bore him two children; then finding he had no intention of fulfilling his promise, she broke off the connection. There was nothing mercenary in it, since he never made her any settled allowance.

In 1824, Mr. Joseph Hayne, of Burderop Park, Wiltshire, a young fellow about twenty-one or twenty-two, known in the best and worst society of London as “Pea-Green Hayne,” a horsey, silly cad, fancied himself desperately in love with her. Here was another chance for the harpy parents, and doubtless under their advice and control she concealed from her lover, whose intentions were honourable, her unfortunate *liaison*. It was Berkeley himself who, one night in the pit of the opera, took the despicable course of making him acquainted with it, intimating at the same time that their connexion still continued. A letter next morning from Hayne informed her of the *éclaircissement*, and that all was broken off between them. Soon afterwards, however, he renewed the engagement and fixed the day for the marriage. All was prepared, the morn-

ing came but not the bridegroom, nor even any message from him. In answer to a letter she wrote, demanding an explanation of this conduct, came a reply to the effect that his friends had succeeded in getting him away into the country, and were keeping him there by force. Very soon, however, we find him back in London, and again yielding to the fascinations of the lovely Maria; for the second time the wedding-day is fixed and the license bought, and this time he takes a solemn oath that nothing shall separate them. Believing that all is now safe, she gives up her profession and sells her wardrobe. But the poor weak-minded creature, who could neither make up resolution enough to have or to leave her, again suffers matters to go on to the very day, and again fails to put in an appearance. Some letters pass between the parties, and then comes an action for breach of promise, damages laid at £14,000. The summing up of the judge was just and admirable; he pointed out that Mr. Hayne had twice renewed his offer of marriage, after being made acquainted with the lady's antecedents, and that therefore she was entitled to compensation, although not to the same amount as if her character had been untarnished. The jury returned for £3,000. The trial was the topic of the day; when it was over, Miss Foote resumed her profession and became the rage. It was just about the time of the *Cox versus Kean* affair, and

by a strange reversal of the ordinary way of the world, while audiences crowded the theatre nightly to howl and hiss at the man, they came in equal crowds to shower sympathetic applause upon the woman. Throughout the provinces it was the same, the people rushed to see the heroine of the famous trial, so that in some places after the house was filled, bars had to be placed across the entrances.

As Maria Darlington in "A Roland for an Oliver," as *The Little Jockey*, and several other parts of that kind, she was very charming, and Macready speaks highly of her acting as Virginia; but had she not been the heroine of a *cause célèbre* she would have been lost among a crowd of actresses of the time, the abilities of several of whom were decidedly superior. "The charm of her beauty," wrote a critic of the day, "is heightened by her many accomplishments and graceful demeanour; she sings, plays, and dances, not indeed like a professor, but like a most gifted lady." There seems to have been a nameless charm and fascination about her which we have all experienced, but cannot define. In 1831 she was married to the Earl of Harrington. She died in 1867.

There is an actress still living, who should take precedence of date to any named in this chapter, I allude to MISS KELLEY, who, born in 1790, made her first appearance at Drury Lane, as the Duke of

York in "Richard the Third," several nights before Cooke's *début*, in 1800. Old playgoers still remember how exquisitely she played the heroines of domestic drama, and of the pieces written for the little Dean Street Theatre. Her sister Lydia made some sensation in 1815 as Juliet to Kean's Romeo.

There is another lady's name still familiar to old playgoers, although her stage career commenced as early as 1789, I allude to MRS. GLOVER. In 1796, although then only in her sixteenth year, she was a favourite actress at Bath. Her first appearance in London was at Covent Garden, in 1797, as Elwina in "Percy." But in tragedy she never rose above mediocrity. As a comedy-actress, Boaden says, she was the only one who ever, in the slightest degree, resembled Mrs. Abington. The line of business technically called "old women" may be said to have died with her; she has never had a successor in such characters as Mrs. Candour, Mrs. Heidelberg, and the Widow Green ("Love Chase"), her acting in which revived the glories of the Garrick period. Her life was not a happy one; her girlhood was passed under the control of a father who not only lived upon her earnings, but entirely monopolised them. He chose for her a husband, supposed to be a man of property, for whom she had no liking, and who followed in his footsteps, until at length, discovering that not content with being himself entirely dependent upon her salary, he kept another

family out of it, she procured a separation. He afterwards attempted to get her children from her by force, and otherwise persecuted her. A self-sacrificing daughter, an injured wife, an admirable mother, no breath of scandal ever tarnished her name. Such characters are by no means uncommon in her much-abused and misunderstood profession. She died in 1850, and almost died upon the stage.

A famous contemporary of Mrs Glover's in her own line of business was MRS. DAVENPORT, who was a member of the Covent Garden company from 1794 to 1820.

I cannot forbear taking a passing glance at MADAME VESTRIS, although her career extended beyond the limits to which I am pledged. Born in London in 1797, she was the daughter of Bartolozzi, the engraver. In 1813 she became the wife of Armand Vestris, the last of the famous trio of dancers of that name. He brought her out upon the stage of the King's Theatre as a singer in the same year. After performing in Paris she opened at Drury Lane in 1821. How she afterwards became the rage, and undertook the management, at different times, of the Olympic, Lyceum and Covent Garden Theatres, cannot be related in these pages.

## CHAPTER X.

WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY.

Intended for the Bar—A First Lesson in Difficulties—Plays with Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Jordan—An Irish Story—An Offer from Covent Garden—The Story of a London Début—Personal Disadvantages—Bitter Disappointments—Rival Richards—Leigh Hunt's Comparison—First Introduction to Sheridan Knowles—Virginius—His Marriage—A Pretty Love Story—First Visit to America—A Parisian Success—Werner—Scrimmage with Bunn—Lessee of Covent Garden—Heavy Losses—As Manager of Drury Lane—Causes of Failure—Edwin Forrest—The New York Riot—A Narrow Escape—Farewell Performances—Harshness of his Character—His Death.

**W**ILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY (born in 1793) was intended for the bar, and commenced his education at Rugby ; but his father, an actor not unknown to London, and some time the manager of the Birmingham, Newcastle, and Manchester theatres, having fallen into great difficulties in the latter town, young William was removed from school. The success of Master Betty, and some talent for recitation he had displayed, seem to have inspired the elder Macready with the hope that the

boy might be made a second juvenile Roscius, and it was accordingly arranged that he should renounce the wig and gown for the sock and buskin.

At sixteen we find him, while his father was in a debtor's prison, managing at Chester a company of refractory actors, whose salaries were in arrears, and conducting the business so skilfully, that by the end of the season he had cleared off all liabilities, and had just sufficient money left to convey himself and three of the principal actors to Newcastle, which was to be the next scene of their labours. Traveling all night through bleak December weather, they arrived about noon, on Christmas Day, at a small town on the borders of Westmoreland, where he tendered his last five-pound note in payment of the chaise. To his dismay, the landlord refused to change it, as he did not like the look of it, and stated at the same time that he could not send them forward in the then state of the roads with fewer than four horses. Here was a terrible fix; they were to open at Newcastle on the following night, and their non-arrival would be most disastrous. Macready's watch had been left at Chester, and his three companions had now to deposit theirs with the obdurate landlord, for an advance of £3 and change of the note. So delighted were they when they found themselves once more *en voyage* from the dreary town that had threatened to be their prison, that they gave three cheers at parting.

That night they slept at Durham, where they were well known, arrived at Newcastle betimes the next morning—and the young manager had learned his “first lesson in the world’s difficulties.”

On June 7th, 1810, the bills of the Birmingham theatre, to which the company had removed at the end of the Newcastle season, announced that the tragedy of “Romeo and Juliet” would be performed that evening, “the part of Romeo by a young gentleman, being his first appearance on any stage.” That young gentleman was Macready, and he seems to have acquitted himself, notwithstanding his extreme nervousness, to the entire satisfaction of the audience. Every round of applause acted like an inspiration on him. When, at the end of the play, he was asked how he felt, “My boyish answer was without disguise, ‘I feel as if I should like to act it all over again!’” Lothair, in “Monk” Lewis’s “Adelgitha,” Young Norval, Zanga—on the strength of some juvenile recitations from the part, but which proved, as might have been expected, a very feeble performance—and George Barnwell followed. The father was very sanguine of his success; the youth was not. But he worked with a will, and after acting a character always endeavoured to improve upon it at each repetition. He tells how on Sundays, after morning service, he would lock himself in the theatre, and pace the stage in every direction, to give himself ease, to become familiar in his de-

appearance

impression  
study of character  
(development)

portment, with exits and entrances, and with every variety of gesture and attitude. His characters were all acted over and over again, and his speeches recited till, tired out, he was glad to breathe the fresh air again. This was for several years a custom with him.

His second year of acting was rendered memorable by his performing Beverley and Young Norval with Mrs. Siddons, who, in passing from Edinburgh to London to take her farewell of the stage, stopped at Newcastle for two nights. With doubt, anxiety, and trepidation he set to work to study the former part, which he had never played, and, on the day of her arrival, was summoned to her hotel to rehearse her scenes.

The great tragedy-queen received him smilingly, and even condescended to jest upon his nervousness. But at night, in his first scene with her, he was so overcome by his fears, that both his presence of mind and his memory forsook him, and he stood bewildered until she prompted him. Gradually, however, he regained his self-possession, and played so effectively in the last scenes that she applauded him loudly from the side, exclaiming, "Bravo, sir, bravo!" In Norval he felt more at home. Upon taking leave, the great actress gave him kind words of advice and encouragement. Soon afterwards he had the honour of playing with the queen of comedy, Mrs. Jordan, and was the Don Felix to

release  
practise

Mrs. Siddons

her Violante. Mrs. Jordan was as encouraging to him as Mrs. Siddons had been.

Soon afterwards he received an offer from Dimond, the great Bath manager, and a quarrel with his father, who was of an overbearing and imperious temper, decided him to accept it. He made his first appearance in the Western city as Romeo, on the 26th of December, 1814. He tells us that he felt quite a flutter at the heart upon seeing his name posted upon the walls, and adds the singular fact that that kind of nervous emotion never left him to the latest moment of his professional career, and that he often crossed over to the other side of the street to avoid passing a bill in which his name was figuring.

The Bath theatre was at this time second only to the great London houses, and a young man unknown to the metropolis coming there to star, was regarded by the company as a piece of presumption, so that he was received among them with a supercilious coldness. His reception by the audience, however, was very hearty.

"The applause," he writes, "increased in each scene, until in the encounter with Tybalt it swelled into prolonged cheering, and, to use a homely phrase, I found myself firm in the saddle. The end of the tragedy was a triumph, and I returned to my little homely lodging to write off to my family the news of my success."

In the Gamester he produced so profound an impression that several ladies were led out of the boxes in hysterics ; the press was highly favourable to him, with one exception. This critic found his impersonation of Beverley to be altogether excellent, if not perfect, but "for the unaccommodating disposition of Nature in the formation of his face."

His fame reaching London, Harris of Covent Garden sent down Fawcett, the stage manager, to see him act. The report was favourable, and soon came an offer of a three years' engagement at a good salary. But the young tragedian elected to remain another year in the provinces. We next find him fulfilling a short engagement at Dublin at £50 a week. He adds another to the many good stories of the facetiousness of the Dublin audience. One night, while performing Pierre in "Venice Preserved," the Jaffier, an actor ponderous in person as well as style, was drowsing out his dying speech, when a voice from the gallery exclaimed, "Ah, now, die at once," to which another from the opposite side responded, "Hould your tongue, you blackguard." Then in a patronising tone to the Jaffier, "Take your time now." He returned to Bath for the winter at an increased salary, but opened negotiations with Drury Lane; they fell through, however, because the Committee were for "cheap ventures." Then came a letter from Fawcett: "Kean seems likely to be more in your

*offer for  
Covent G.*

way than Young would be at Covent Garden. All your best parts you might act with us and not trespass upon anybody. Come to us next year—for one year, two years, three years, or for life. The article shall be made as you please, only don't be exorbitant." The terms proposed and accepted would be considered modest enough in the present day—five years' engagement at a salary which was to begin at £16 and end at £18. But he was still uneasy and full of fretful misgivings, shrinking at the great trial before him.

*opens at Covent Garden*

The 16th of September, 1816, was appointed for his opening night at Covent Garden. A first appearance upon the London stage, in those days, was considered a terrible ordeal, and its success or failure frequently decided the actor's future destiny. At the rehearsals, unaccustomed to the vast size of the theatre, he was filled with a feeling almost of dismay. His opening part was to be Orestes in Ambrose Philip's "Distressed Mother." Charles Kemble was to be Pyrrhus, Mrs. Egerton, a good melodramatic actress, but nothing more, the Hermione, and Mrs. Glover, the greatest *comic* actress of the day, but very indifferent in tragedy, the distracted Andromache. All depended upon himself. Describing the event he says: "After an early dinner, I lay down, endeavouring to compose myself till the hour appointed for my setting out to the theatre. The hackney-coach was called, and

I can almost fancy in recollecting it that I feel every disquieting jolt of the rumbling vehicle as it slowly performed the office of a hurdle in conveying me to the place of execution. The silent process of dressing was only interrupted by the call-boy Parsloe's voice, 'Overture on, sir!' which sent a chill to my heart. The official rap at the door soon followed, and the summons, 'Mr. Macready,' made me instantly rally all my energies, and with a firm step I went forward to my trial. But the appearance of resolute composure assumed by the player at this turning-point of his life belies the internal struggles he endures. These eventful trials, in respect to the state of mind and body in which they are encountered, so resemble each other that one described describes all. The same agitation, and effort to master it, the dazzled vision, the short quick breath, the dry palate, the throbbing of the heart—all, however painfully felt, must be effectually disguised in the character the actor strives to place before his audience. Abbott, as Pylades, was waiting for me at the side scene, and when the curtain had risen, grasping his hand almost convulsively, I dashed upon the stage, exclaiming, as in a transport of the highest joy, 'Oh, Pylades, what's life without a friend!' The welcome of applause that greeted my entrance (always so liberally bestowed by a London public on every new performer) was all I could have de-

sired; but it was not until the loud and long plaudits that followed the vehement burst of passion in the line, 'Oh, ye gods! give me Hermione or let me die!' that I gained any degree of self-possession. As the play proceeded I became more and more animated, under the conflicting emotions of the distracted lover, and at the close, as I sank, '*furiis agitatus Orestes*,' into the arms of Pylades, the prolonged cheers of my auditors satisfied me of my success. The custom of 'calling for' the player had not then been introduced into our English theatres; but it was considered a sufficient testimony of a triumphant issue to give out the play for repetition on the Friday and Monday following. Congratulations were profusely tendered me by the various members of the Covent Garden company, who stopped me in passing from the stage to my dressing-room; and when summoned to the manager's room, Mr. Harris, in his peculiar way, observed, 'Well, my boy, you have done capitally; and if you could carry a play along with such a cast, I don't know what you cannot do!' I was to dine with him the next day to settle further proceedings, and I returned to my lodgings in a state of mind like one not feeling awake from a disturbing dream, grateful for my escape, yet almost questioning the reality of what had passed."

Kean had been in a private box applauding

liberally. But the triumph was only half-assured until the press had pronounced, and it was with feverish impatience he waited for the morning papers. The notices were favourable upon the whole; the "Times," while allowing him a certain amount of ability, did not consider it sufficient to shake Young or intimidate Charles Kemble. But Hazlitt, in the "Examiner," the great theatrical authority of the day, pronounced him to be "by far the best tragic actor that has come out in our remembrance, with the exception of Mr. Kean." This was high praise, placing him as it did above Young. Other critics were rather severe upon his personal appearance. One evening, while sitting in the boxes, he overheard the following conversation between two people seated in front of him. "Have you seen the new actor?" "What, Macready? No, I have not; I am told he is a capital actor, but devilish ugly; they say he is an ugly likeness of Liston!" When Charles Kemble told his brother John that he believed Macready would take a foremost rank in his profession, the other answered with a shrug, "Oh, Charles! with that face!" After playing in a forgotten tragedy, called "The Italian Lover," Harris decided to put him in the bill with Charles Young, to alternate Othello and Iago. Othello was a character he had played but little, and Iago he had not even studied; neither actor was very successful. Hazlitt said "Young

in Othello was like a great humming-top, and Macready in Iago like a mischievous boy whipping him." He began to think he had made his venture too soon ; Young was in possession of the leading tragic parts, Charles Kemble of the youthful, chivalrous ones, and he dared not essay those of Kean. "Where, then, is the place for me?" he asks. "The Slave," a poor melodrama made successful by a splendid cast, embracing as it did Terry, Liston, Emery, Jones, and that exquisite singer Miss Stephens, gave him an original part in Gambia. But Kemble and Miss O'Neill were the great attractions, and Booth, whom injudicious rivalry absurdly set up against Kean, was playing Richard. In a new piece entitled "The Conquest of Taranto, or St. Clara's Eve," Macready was cast for, "one of the meanest, most despicable villains that a romancer's invention ever teemed with." He offered to pay the forfeit of thirty pounds rather than appear in it, but the management insisted. The play failed, yet so finely did Macready act in one of the scenes that he overpowered Booth in the heroic character, received the plaudits intended for him, and was pronounced by the "Morning Herald" "to have saved the piece." It was the last of Booth's fiascos : he appeared only four times afterwards. This unexpected turn of fortune taught Macready for the future "confidence in the ultimate triumph of careful and honest study." In Shiel's "Apostate"

he was cast for Pescara, another repulsive part, although one infinitely superior to the last, and even beside Young, Charles Kemble, and Miss O'Neill secured for himself a great success. Tieck in his "Letters on the English Drama," remarking on this performance, says: "This villain was admirably represented, and was indeed so vehement, truthful and powerful a personation, that for the first time since my arrival in England I felt myself recalled to the best days of German acting." However much he might have pleased the critical portion of the audience, Macready was not a draw, and that is the point of view from which the manager must always regard his leading actors.

His first part in the second season was in a melodramatic after-piece. So bitterly mortified was he with this treatment, that he had serious thoughts of abandoning the stage, studying for an Oxford degree, and entering the Church; and probably he would have carried out these intentions, had not his brother, who was an officer in the army, required help at his hands just then, obliging him to borrow a sum of money which could only be repaid by his professional earnings. He gained a triumph, although not in the high poetic sphere to which he aspired, in the dramatic version of Scott's "Rob-Roy;" and a second in another of Shiel's tragedies, "Balamira, or the Fall of Tunis," in which, although he was cast the inevitable heavy part, it was con-

*Macready  
wishes to  
quit the stage*

sidered the most effective in the play, and the "Herald" pronounced "that he had made a giant stride in his profession." As Posthumus and Glenalvon he was also highly successful, and by the end of the season felt that his position had in every way improved. As a proof, Elliston paid him £100 for a week's performance at Birmingham.

During the opening weeks of the Covent Garden season of 1819-20 the fortunes of the house were at a low ebb. Young had seceded, Miss O'Neill, Miss Stephens, and Liston were away, and before long a quarrel between Harris and Charles Kemble caused the retirement of the latter; salaries were not paid, and the manager told Shiel that he did not know in the morning when he arose whether he should not shoot himself before the night. As a desperate resort he proposed to put up Macready in Richard. To enter the arena against Kean in one of his greatest characters was a hazardous experiment, and it was with a "sickening sinking at the heart" our actor saw his name announced for the part. The announcement caused great excitement, and the house was crowded. He was accorded a very hearty reception, and the play went well, but without any strong demonstration until the scene with Tyrrel, in the fourth act. "With all the eagerness of fevered impatience I rushed to him, inquiring of him, in short broken sentences, the children's fate; with rapid decision on the mode of disposing of them, hastily

gave him his order, and, hurrying him away, exclaimed with triumphant exultation, 'Why, then, my loudest fears are hushed.' The pit rose to a man, and continued waving hats and handkerchiefs, in a perfect tempest of applause for some minutes. The battle was won. The excitement of the audience was maintained at a fever heat throughout the remainder of the tragedy. The tent scene closed with acclamations that drowned the concluding couplet, and at the death scene the pit rose again and cheered vociferously." Worthy of note is the following passage. "The practice was this evening first introduced at Covent Garden of calling on the principal actor. In obedience to the impatient and persevering summons of the house, I was desired by Fawcett to go before the curtain; and accordingly I announced the tragedy for repetition amidst congratulating shouts." The press was enthusiastic in praises of the new Richard; the houses were well filled on each night of repetition, the treasury was reopened on the following Saturday, and the performers paid him the compliment of admitting that to him they were indebted for their salaries. Soon Elliston, at the other house, brought Kean into the field in the same part, and for a time the town talk was the merits of the rival Richards, ballads were sung about the streets, and the windows of the print-shops were filled with pictures and caricatures. Leigh Hunt's contrast between the two actors is very fine. "Com-

pared with Mr. Kean, we should say that a division of merits, usual enough with the performance of such comprehensive characters as Shakespeare's, has taken place in the Richards of these two actors. Mr. Kean's Richard is the more sombre, perhaps the deeper part of him—Mr. Macready's the livelier and more animal part, a very considerable one nevertheless. Mr. Kean's is the more gloomy and reflective villain, rendered so by the united effects of his deformity and subtle-mindedness; Mr. Macready's is the more ardent and bold-faced one, borne up by a temperament naturally high and sanguine, though pulled down by mortification. The one has more of the seriousness of conscious evil in it, the other of the gaiety of meditated success. Mr. Kean's has gone deeper even than the relief of his conscience—he has found melancholy at the bottom of that necessity for relief; Mr. Macready's is more sustained in his troubled waters by constitutional vigour and buoyancy. In short, Mr. Kean's Richard is more like King Richard darkened by the shadow of his approaching success, and announcing by the depth of his desperation when it shall be disputed; Mr. Macready's Richard is more like the Duke of Gloucester, brother to the gay tyrant Edward the Fourth, and partaking as much of his character as the contradiction of the family handsomeness in his person would allow. If these two features in the character of Richard could be united

by an actor, the performance would be a perfect one." ]

In Coriolanus he scored another success, and while Kemble's splendid performance was still fresh in the memory of playgoers. He was offered £50 a night to play at Brighton, and old Mr. Harris, the proprietor of Covent Garden, came up to town purposely to thank him for the service he had rendered the theatre in its distress.

It was less, however, as a Shakespearian actor than as the creator of a series of original poetic characters, chiefly from the pen of Sheridan Knowles, that Macready achieved his ultimate fame, and upon which his posthumous reputation must rest. His first introduction to Knowles, and to that writer's masterpiece, is best told in his own words. "In the course of the month of April, an application was made to me by my old Glasgow friend, John Tait, on the subject of a tragedy that had been produced at Glasgow with much applause. The author he described as a man of original genius, and one in whose fortunes he and many of his fellow-citizens took a deep interest. It so happened that I had undergone the reading of two or three tragedies when late at Glasgow, and it was with consequent distrust that, to oblige a very good friend, I undertook to read this. Tait was to send the MS. without delay, and I looked forward to my task with no very good will. It was

*Coriola*

*Sheridan  
Knowles  
plan*

about three o'clock one day that I was preparing to go out when a parcel arrived from Tait, and the MS. of 'Virginus.' After some hesitation, I thought it best to get the business over, to do at once what I had engaged to do, and I sat down determinedly to my work. The freshness and simplicity of the dialogue fixed my attention; I read on and on, and was soon absorbed in the interest of the story and the passion of the scenes, till at its close I found myself in such a state of excitement that for a time I was undecided what step to take. Impulse was in the ascendant, and snatching up my pen I hurriedly wrote, as my agitated feelings prompted, a letter to the author, to me then a perfect stranger." After a moment's reflection, however, he considered it might be deemed extravagant, tore it up, and after dinner re-read the MS. in a more collected mood. His first impressions were confirmed, and he wrote to Knowles his opinion of the work, assuring him that he would do his best to procure its acceptance and the highest payment. The next morning he again read through the piece with Proctor, who was equally delighted with it. The terms arranged by Harris were £400 for twenty nights, and £100 more for its performance the next season. But not one sixpence was spent in the getting up, and, to be correct in costume, Macready was obliged to purchase his own dresses. Fawcett delegated to him the stage manage-

ment. Charles Kemble was the Icilius; Terry, Dentatus; Abbott, Appius Claudius; Miss Foote, Virginia. Macready's every thought was engrossed in *Virginius*, and from the first hour in the morning to the last of the night his mind was filled with its images, and every vacant hour was employed in rehearsing its pathetic touches, and its whirlwinds of passion. "On the 17th of May, 1820," he continues, "'*Virginius*' was first acted, and its early scenes were not unattended with danger, Charles Kemble being so hoarse that not one word spoken in the lowest whisper could be heard; but the action of the scene told its story with sufficient distinctness to keep alive its interest. This grew as the play advanced, and in the third act, in Icilius' great scene, Kemble's voice came out in all its natural strength, and brought down thunders of applause. With the progress of the play, the rapt attention of the audience gradually kindled into enthusiasm. Long-continued cheers followed the close of each succeeding act; half-stifled screams and involuntary ejaculations burst forth when the fatal blow was struck to the daughter's heart; and the curtain fell amidst the most deafening applause of a highly excited auditory."

*Virginius* continued to be one of if not *the* greatest of all Macready's impersonations, a performance to be classed with Garrick's Richard, Kean's Othello, John Kemble's Coriolanus. The "Morning He-

rald" said the next morning: "The delineation of this arduous character by Mr. Macready will take its place among the first performances on the stage. It is one of the finest specimens of art which his great and growing genius has yet produced. Austere, tender, familiar, elevated, mingling at once terror and pathos, he ran over the scale of dramatic expression with the highest degree of what may be called power."

In the following season he made a great success in a Shakespearian character, in which neither Garrick nor John Kemble had been able to produce much effect, "Henry the Fourth," in the Second Part of the play of that name. One of Macready's finest and best-known portraits, painted by Jackson, was taken in that part. The play had been revived to introduce a gorgeous coronation procession, in imitation of the pageant that had just been performed at Westminster; it was finely cast. Farren was Shallow; Emery, Silence; Blanchard, Pistol; Charles Kemble the Prince; Fawcett, Falstaff. The revival filled Covent Garden for many nights, extending the season far beyond its usual limits.

In 1821 he entered into an agreement with Harris for another five years, at twenty pounds a week, that being at the time the highest salary paid in the theatre to any performer. Young was re-engaged the same season, and shared the principal

parts with him. Both distinguished themselves in a fine revival of "Julius Cæsar," particularly Macready, whose Cassius was a masterly impersonation. A disagreement among the holders of the patent led to Harris's secession from the management of Covent Garden, for the rental of which his partner undertook to pay him the enormous sum of £12,500. The new managers proved utterly incompetent, lost some of their best actors, among them Macready himself, all of whom went over to the opposite house and left the bunglers to the fate they merited—bankruptcy. Elliston, ever keen and energetic, offered him £20 a night for forty nights, an offer with which he immediately closed. The interval between the London seasons had been mostly passed in starring through the country, where he was immensely successful. Caius Gracchus was his great success during this engagement, but the refusal of Kean to appear in the same play with him prevented its renewal, while the hostility of a certain portion of the press, headed by "John Bull," rendered it far from satisfactory.

His marriage, celebrated on June 24, 1824, at old St. Pancras church, is the next important event to be recorded in his life. While starring at Glasgow in 1815, a pretty little girl about nine years of age was sent to play a child's part in an old drama called "The Hunter of the Alps;" she had not been allowed sufficient time for study, and

married

was imperfect in the words, for which he severely scolded her. Five years afterwards he met her again at Aberdeen, where she was his Virginia on the opening night. "She might," he says, "have been Virginia herself. The beauty of her face was more in its expression than in feature, though no want of loveliness was there. Her rehearsals greatly pleased me, her acting being so much in earnest. There was a native grace in her deportment and every movement, and never were innocence and sensibility more sweetly personified than in her mild look and speaking eyes streaming with tears." He learned that, young as she was, she was the support of her family. During an engagement of three weeks, he had many opportunities of conversing with her, and his first favourable impression continued to increase. He took great pains with her professionally, and on the last night presented her with the handsomest shawl he could procure in Perth. At parting, he desired her to claim his influence and aid in any way, should she require it, and to rely upon always finding a ready friend in him. The following year he recommended her to his father, who was now lessee of the Bristol theatre. There, during a starring engagement, he met her again and again; then followed a correspondence, "which I tried to make instrumental to the advancement of her education, and then it was, in my own case as no doubt in

hers, that 'love approached me under friendship's name,' although unsuspected and unconfessed by either of us." The death of her father while she was acting at Dublin, at length brought about the long-deferred explanation, and he could no longer conceal from himself that love was the inspiration of all the counsel and assistance he had rendered her: he proposed and was accepted. "It is," he adds, "but simple justice to her beloved memory to repeat the truth that, although in a worldly sense I might have formed a more advantageous connection, I could not have met with qualities to compare with the fond affection, the liveliness, and simple worth that gave happiness to so many years of my life."

William Tell was his last great original part, previous to his departure for America. He made his first appearance at the Park Theatre, New York, on October 2, 1826, and was enthusiastically received by a crowded house. At Boston the boxes were let by auction, at premiums exceeding 200 dollars. But his progress was only a repetition of that of Kean and Cooke, already given in these pages. A far more hazardous engagement was that at the Salle Favart at Paris. The French critics, however, were very warm in their eulogies, comparing him with Le Kain and Talma. No English actor was ever before or since so successful in Paris. About the time of his return from America, he

*William Tell*  
*America*  
*France*

took a house, Elm Place, at Elstree, on the borders of Middlesex and Hertfordshire, three miles beyond Edgware, where he resided many years. The addition of Werner to his original parts, another grand creation, is the only event that need be recorded previous to his notorious fracas with Bunn at Drury Lane, in the season of 1836.

Mr. Bunn was not altogether the right man in the right place, as the manager of a great London theatre, and he and Macready were constantly at variance. There were doubtless faults upon both sides; the actor's was a discontented, irascible temper, which despised the shortcomings of his chief, and the chief took every occasion in a petty way to annoy the actor. One night Bunn made him play the *first* three acts of Richard—all the finer scenes are in the last two. Boiling with rage, as he came off the stage at the end of the play, he rushed into the manager's room, and exclaiming, "You d—d scoundrel! How dare you use me in this manner?" struck him in the face. There was a tussle upon a sofa, which lasted until the combatants were separated. Of course Macready appeared no more in the theatre. The newspapers were full of it—"Great fight, B—nn and M—y," was placarded upon the walls, and a suit for damages instituted.\* "No one can more severely condemn my precipitation than myself," he says in his Diary. "No

\* Damages were assessed £150.

enemy can censure me more harshly, no friend lament more deeply my forgetfulness of all I ought to have thought upon." It was a subject of self-reproach to him for many a day afterwards.

On July 24, 1837, he entered upon the lesseeship of Covent Garden, gathered about him all the available talent of the day, and opened on the 30th of September with "The Winter's Tale." But the season was unremunerative from the first, and as early as the 19th of October, we find him proposing to restore the salary he had received from the treasury, and signing two days afterwards a cheque for £300 to meet the week's deficiencies. He produced "The Bridal," an alteration of "The Maid's Tragedy;" "The Lady of Lyons;" and a splendid revival of "King Lear" and "Coriolanus;" but when the house closed he had sustained a very heavy pecuniary loss. Nevertheless he undertook a second season. From September 24, 1838, to January 1, 1839, the loss was £950. The pantomime, however, reimbursed him with profit. Then came "Richelieu," of which he was very doubtful up to the time of rehearsal, and the glorious revivals of "Henry V." and "The Tempest." The latter ran fifty-five nights, the receipts averaging over £230 nightly. The two following seasons he was at the Haymarket playing "The Sea Captain" and "Money;" the latter was an immense success.

Manager  
Covent Garden

The Winter's  
Tale

Richelieu

The Tempest

Money

*Drury Lane*

At the end of 1841 he undertook the management of Drury Lane, which he opened with an elaborate get-up of the "Merchant of Venice." He carried it on a second season, with such a repertory of old and new plays as have never since been seen, unless we except the Phelps management at Sadler's Wells. But the result was not profitable. This was not so much from the failure of public support as on account of his enormous expenses, of which the rental and the conditions under which the theatre was let were the most exorbitant and oppressive. The free, or silver, tickets of the shareholders were a cruel burden upon full nights, rendering a number of the best seats unremunerative; added to which every dress and scene found by the lessee became the property of the theatre evermore. In those facts are contained the secret of more than half a century of failures at the National theatres, a worthy management of which is impossible until directors become more liberal and enlightened.

*America*  
*Paris*

Upon relinquishing Drury Lane, he paid a second visit to America, and on his return, in 1845, revisited Paris, where he played Hamlet before the Court at the Tuileries, and was presented with a magnificent poniard by Louis Philippe. A third engagement in the United States was rendered memorable by a specimen of Yankee rowdyism such as Kean had experienced a few years before, common enough in the America ridiculed by Dickens,

but which, it is to be hoped, has disappeared in the present generation.

Edwin Forrest, the American tragedian, while playing at the Princess's Theatre during a recent visit to England, had been hissed, and chose to attribute this mark of disapprobation to Macready's influence. The accusation, however, was totally without foundation, indeed, one of the New York papers when reviewing the riot I am about to describe, boldly stated that the insult he received was of American origin, "the product of the spleen and envy of one of his own countrymen." Mr. Forrest returned the compliment by publicly hissing Macready one night at Edinburgh.

When Macready arrived at Philadelphia on his second visit, a ruffianly combination, either under or not under the auspices of Mr. Forrest, was made against him. He performed *Macbeth* almost in dumb show, amidst occasional showers of nuts and rotten eggs; but he played through the part, and at the end addressed the audience, pledging his sacred word of honour that he had never shown any hostility to "an American actor." This called forth a public letter from Forrest, in which he confessed and gloried in having hissed the English actor, but denied having assisted in any systematic organisation against him, adding, with an insolent ruffianism which proclaimed him to be more than capable of all he

denied, that his advice had been to let "the superannuated driveller alone." On his return visit to New York, Macready opened on May 7th, 1849, as Macbeth. He was greeted with what seemed to him at first a very extraordinary enthusiasm, but which he by-and-by began to perceive was only a counter demonstration to the howls and shrieks of another part of the audience. "They would not let me speak," he says, "they hung out placards—'You have been proved a liar,' &c.; flung a rotten egg close to me. I pointed it to the audience, and smiled with contempt, persisting in my endeavour to be heard. I could not have been less than a quarter of an hour on the stage altogether, with perfect *sang froid* and good humour, reposing in the consciousness of my own truth. At last there was nothing for it, and I said 'Go on,' and the play proceeded in dumb show, I hurrying the players on. Copper cents were thrown, some struck me, four or five eggs, a great many apples, nearly if not quite a peck of potatoes, lemons, pieces of wood, a bottle of asafœtida, which splashed my own dress, smelling of course most horribly." He bore these brutalities manfully through the first two acts, but at the opening of the third they began to throw chairs, upon which he retired, undressed, and refused to go on again.

The whole affair was a clique, and I have been

told by Mr. John Ryder, who was travelling with Macready at the time, that he was offered a large bribe to come forward, and swear falsely that Macready had conspired to render Forrest a failure in England. I need not add the offer was indignantly refused. All the better class opinion of New York was with the injured man : but alas, rowdyism was then as now omnipotent. Emboldened by the sympathy he received, he appeared again on the 10th of May. The clique soon made themselves heard, but the management was prepared for it, and at a given signal the police "closed in upon the scoundrels, occupying the middle seats, who were furiously vociferating and gesticulating, and seemed to lift them or bundle them in a body out of the centre of the house, amid the cheers of the audience. "As well as I can remember, the bombardment outside now began. Stones were hurled against the windows in Eighth Street, smashing many; the work of destruction then became more systematic; the volleys of stones flew without intermission, battering and smashing all before them; the gallery and upper gallery still kept up the din within, aided by the crashing of glass and boarding without. The second act passed, the noise and violence without increasing, the contest within becoming feebler." A timid friend advised him to bring the performance to a close, but he would not listen to the suggestion. During the fourth act stones were

Aston  
Riot

hurled through the windows, and struck the chandelier : the audience hurried from their seats, and huddled against the walls. Into the fifth act, he says, he threw his whole soul, "exciting the audience to sympathy even with the glowing words of fiction, whilst those dreadful deeds of real crime and outrage were roaring at intervals in our ears, and rising to madness all around us." The death scene was loudly cheered, and he was called before the curtain amidst loud acclamations. While he was dressing, people came into his room full of consternation. The military were called out—were drawn up in the Bowery—the mob were getting stronger. "Suddenly we heard a volley of musketry. 'Hark, what's that?' I asked. 'The soldiers have fired ! My God !' I exclaimed. Another volley and another. . . . News came that several were killed ; I was really insensible to the degree of danger in which I stood, and saw at once—there being no avoidance—there was nothing for it but to meet the worst with dignity, and so I stood prepared." His friends urged the necessity of disguise, and he changed clothes with one of the performers, went down into the orchestra, got over into the parquet and mixed with the stream of the audience who were leaving the theatre. Threading the excited crowd without he was conducted to the house of a friend, where he was to sleep. But soon came another friend to report that several men had been

killed, and he must get away out of the city at once; a carriage was ordered to be at the door at four o'clock in the morning to take a doctor to some gentleman's house near New Rochelle. During the night such comforting scraps of intelligence were brought in as—a crowd was seen pursuing an omnibus, which the pursuers protested contained Macready. "They've killed twenty of us, and by G— we'll kill him," was their cry. "As the clock struck four, we were on the move. All was still in the dawn of morning, but we waited some ten minutes—an age of suspense—the carriage arrived. I shook the hand of my preserver and friend, my heart responded to the prayer of 'God bless him!' and stepping into the carriage—a covered phaeton, we turned up the Fifth Avenue, and were on our way to safety." In the following month of September, ten of the Astor Place rioters were tried at the Court of General Sessions, New York, and after a fifteen days' trial were all convicted. The sentences varied from one month's imprisonment to one year's, with a fine of 250 dollars. Such was the end of the most serious, and disgraceful riot in stage annals.

Upon his return to England, he began a series of farewell performances through the country. On the 26th of February, 1851, he took his farewell benefit in "Macbeth."

On that day he began his Diary with these

words: "My first thought as I awoke was that this day was to be the close of my professional life. I meditated on it, and not one feeling of regret mingled with the placid satisfaction accompanying my performance of every act, needfully preparative to the coming event, as I said to myself, 'I shall never have to do this again.'" Here is a contradiction to Dr. Johnson's aphorism, that we never do anything consciously for the last time without regret. The confession strikes us disagreeably, after reading only on the previous page this entry: "I have attained the loftiest position in the art to which my destiny directed me, have gained the respect of the honoured and respected, and the friendship of the highly gifted, amiable and distinguished." Add to this a handsome fortune, and all gained by the profession he leaves without a sigh. How different to the affectionate lingerings of Garrick and others. It is one of the least amiable traits of Macready's character that he seldom mentions the stage unless it is contemptuously; he is for ever thinking of the ignorant and bigoted who look down upon the actor, instead of upon the intellectual and warm-hearted who hold him in honour; in the midst of his triumph he exclaims, "It is an unhappy life!" From that point of vantage he can even look back upon the early struggles of his youth and moan, "It was a very unhappy, unprofitable time!" It is with him always "my unhappy pro-

fession, my degraded profession!" Yet in one place he has the grace to say, "How often have I envied in others, less fortunate than myself in public favour, this passionate devotion to the stage. To me its drawbacks are ever present!" He is jealous of all success that could affect him. It depresses his spirits to hear of Mr. Phelps's success under his own management, although he knows he shall reap the profit of it. He is full of regrets—he regrets what he has lost, what he has spent, and what he has given away. No man was ever so intolerant of the shortcomings of his brother actors; he was as intolerant of the deficiencies of some poor strolling company in, say, Berwick-on-Tweed or Dumfries, the largest salary among which would not exceed a pound, as he would have been to those of an actor at Drury Lane, and he expected them to be as perfect in their parts and to play up to him with as much skill as Charles Kemble or Abbott, or any London principals; the smallest fault was reprobated with a savagery that rendered his name such a terror wherever he went, that actors have been known to throw up their engagements rather than act with him, and fear and nervousness often created the very deficiencies that so enraged him. At rehearsal the performers were ranged with the precision of chess-men, the very board, nay, the very nail, upon which each was to stand was marked out, and woe betide the one who deviated a foot from

the spot indicated. That he keenly regretted such outbursts of temper after they were past, is shown by many entries in his diaries. "I feel," he says in one place, "the folly, the madness, the provoking extravagance of my behaviour, treating men like slaves, and assuming a power over them which is most unjustifiable and most dangerous, and yet contrition and stinging reflection seem to have no power in the punishment they inflict or of producing amendment." Much of this was owing to his own indefatigable industry; probably no man ever studied his profession so intensely; all his great characters were read and pondered over each time he acted them unto the very last, and he never played any part, however admirably, that he did not on each repetition seek to better it. But Macready never loved art for art's sake, never really felt that the man ennobled his calling and not the calling the man; therefore he can never be ranked among such true artistes as Garrick and Siddons, to whom the stage was all in all—their fortune and their glory.

As a Shakespearian actor, Macready can scarcely take a place among the greatest of his predecessors. It was rather in such characters as *Virginius*, as *Tell*, *Werner*, *Ion*, *Richelieu*, characters with an admixture of the melodramatic element in them, that he was pre-eminent. In his domestic relations, to judge by the deep affection with which he ever speaks

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in his diaries of his wife and children, he was an admirable man. With all his devotion to the study of his art he always found time for the cultivation of his mind, and he had a critical knowledge and fine appreciation of both ancient and modern literature.

His death, in 1873, and his burial at Kensal Green, are still fresh in the memory of the public.

I cannot conclude this chapter without acknowledging my indebtedness to Sir Frederick Pollock's admirable work, from which I have drawn most of its materials.

## CHAPTER THE LAST.

### THE STAGE OF THE PRESENT DAY.

THE history of the legitimate drama virtually closes with the retirement of Macready. But an addendum was added by a little theatre in Islington, where for a few years longer Mr. Phelps and an admirable company, including such actors as Henry Marston, George Bennett, Mrs. Warner, Miss Glyn still struggled, and not unsuccessfully, to uphold the grand traditions of the English stage. Mr. Phelps is the last of the long line of legitimate actors, recipients of unbroken tradition from the days of Burbadge. Without ever rising in tragedy to any startling heights of greatness, his interpretations were thoughtful and artistic, and had the true Shakespearian ring; if they did not highly impress the imagination, they satisfied the intellect. But in certain parts of comedy a far higher praise must be awarded him, his "Bottom" was a performance over which Charles Lamb himself would

have grown enthusiastic, and might have stood beside the finest impersonations of Garrick's stage.

Painting, sculpture, poetry, music have their eras of rise, perfection and decay; they flourish but for a time; and there is no reason that acting should be exempt from the same mysterious law. We can trace the decay of the art from the retirement of Garrick—great tragic actors becoming fewer and fewer; but the death blow was given to the legitimate drama when the patent rights were withdrawn from the two great houses. Dramatic talent was never so plentiful that there was sufficient of it to make up half a dozen companies. While Drury Lane and Covent Garden had the sole privilege of representing the legitimate drama, the efforts of all actors were directed towards those goals; and as there could be but a few leading artistes employed, many men and women of real ability, although not of the highest, were obliged to check their overweening ambition, and content themselves with secondary and third rate positions, which they admirably filled, although they would have been but mediocre in a first; thus a kind of natural selection was brought about, and the fittest artiste, as a rule, occupied the fittest place. But when the legitimate drama was thrown open to every manager who pleased to avail himself of the privilege, these overweening ambitions broke all bounds; the man who would have played Laertes

excellently at Drury Lane, burst forth as a bad Hamlet in some minor house, Rosse swelled into Macbeth, and Edmund into King Lear, and disdained henceforth any inferior position. Under such a régime, even had the line of Garricks, Kembles and Keans stretched out to the present day, satisfactory performances of Shakespeare would have been impossible, for the finest Othello or Macbeth may be marred by the incompetency of a Lodovico or a Seyton. Even within the last decade we have witnessed some well wrought and thoughtful impersonations of Shakespeare's great parts, but all such attempts at resuscitation have been marred by the mouthings and utter incapacity of a set of miserable subordinates. The very secret of delivering blank verse is a lost art. Hear it from the mouths of the few of the past age that yet linger, Mr. Phelps or Mr. Ryder for instance, then listen to it as given by the trousers-pocket-actors of the present day, from whose lips it falls without rhythm, harmony, or sense.

Not less fatal than even the repeal of the patent act has been the breaking up of the old theatrical circuits. These were the schools in which actors were trained. In the old times, a stage-struck youth usually commenced his career in some strolling company, such as have been described in these pages, and having there mastered the rudiments of his art, passed into the York or Norwich

circuits. Here his education began in earnest, here he was thoroughly grounded in the round of the legitimate drama; his brains were not distracted, nor was his style vitiated by a never ending series of new plays; a few old melodramas of the "Castle Spectre" type were the only variations from pure tragedy and comedy he was called upon to represent. From York he would, as a rule, pass to Bath, and thence, if his abilities warranted it, to Drury Lane or Covent Garden, or the Haymarket. In all his engagements he had played the same round of characters, and when he stepped upon the London stage it was not in some new part in some new play, written for the occasion, in which he was to *experiment*, but in some old part of which years before he had carefully studied every point, gesture, tone, look, in which great actors before him had delighted generations of audiences, and by their excellences he was now to be sternly judged. There are no such training schools now, no theatres in which young artistes can study the higher branches of their profession.

The old circuits have entirely disappeared; indeed, except in a few great centres, such as Liverpool and Manchester, the provincial stage, as a self-supporting institution, is almost non-existent; a pantomime at Christmas, and a series of travelling companies with specialities are the only entertainments offered to the public. The general

decadence of the art, which almost threatened its extinction twenty years ago, country theatres falling into the hands of a set of unprincipled adventurers, who gathered about them companies on a par with themselves, and above all railroads, have destroyed the old circuits. In nothing is our tendency to centralisation more pronounced than in things dramatic. Most provincials spend a portion of the year in town, taking their theatrical amusements there only; and, after the splendidly appointed London houses, cannot endure the shabby apologies of their native towns. It is not the fashion to go to second class country theatres, except when they are visited by some metropolitan starring company.

All the old conditions of the stage having been thus swept away, what is to be said of the present and the future? In regard to the future it is difficult to predict. Our theatre is in a transition period, slowly emerging from the utter ruin and degradation in which it was prostrated some ten to fifteen years back by burlesque and sensation; *dramatically* it stands in a far higher and healthier position than it did then, as would at once be obvious to any person who took the trouble to compare the playbills of that period with those of the last two or three seasons; but *histrionically* we are in an even worse plight; many actors have disappeared during the last twenty years whose places

still remain vacant. To instance a few—Mr. Phelps, Henry Marston, Buckstone, Compton, Charles Mathews, Webster, Frank Mathews, &c., &c. Where are their successors? The very lines of business they represented seem to have died with them. The light comedian, the old man,\* the low comedian, as far as the highest excellence is concerned, have disappeared. There is not a low comedian on the stage who can excite a laugh by genuine humour, or by anything save utter buffoonery; a few grimaces and mouth twistings, a few mannerisms repeated *ad nauseam* in every scene and every part, make up what is called comic acting at the present day.

Yet I heartily admit, although the old lines are thus disappearing, we have still a few good actors. In the face of such admirable representations as those of "Olivia" and "Diplomacy," and Mr. Shiel Barry's performance in "Les Cloches de Corneville," it would be unjust prejudice to deny it; and scattered through the different West End theatres others could be found, whom it would be superfluous for me to particularise. It is in such carefully organised theatres as the Prince of Wales's and the Court, that the future hope of the drama

\* An exception must be made in favour of Mr. William Farren, whose recent performance of Sir Abel Handy could only excite regret that such possibilities of fine old comedy acting should be wasted in parts unworthy of his talents.

rests, and to which we must look for a new school. Domestic and commonplace, dealing only with the superficial phases of an over ripe civilisation, calling upon no great powers of genius in the actors, indeed, scarcely elevating them beyond the tame emotions of every-day existence, it can never rise to the dignity and grandeur of that school, the object of which was to analyse and depict all that was noble, sublime, terrible and tender in human nature; but it will be true to its age, and present as faithful a picture of the complex and artificial civilisation of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in which humanity is iced, like the summits of certain slumbering volcanoes, as did the Elizabethan of its own strong, fervid, glorious era.

To say that Mr. Henry Irving is the most original and remarkable actor that has come to the fore in the present decade, is but to endorse the generally accepted opinion of cultivated society. His merits as a Shakespearian actor it does not come within my limits to discuss; his Hamlet, Macbeth and Richard, however they might have lacked the fire and inspiration of the elder school, by evidences of devoted study and by keen and subtle appreciation of their creator's meaning, gave an intellectual pleasure such as could not be derived from the performance of any other individual actor at present upon the stage; while in such weird

conceptions as Mathias and Eugene Aram he carries us into a new region of art, of which, whatever may be our doubts of its value, there can be none regarding his execution.

But the legitimate drama is dead, and there will be no resurrection in our time. And yet at no period has the stage been so popular, and the public so craving for good acting. Puritanism, Heaven be praised, and the old superstition that saw the devil's cloven foot ever peeping beneath the actor's buskin are fading away, and the people who object to theatrical amusements are now only to be found amongst the most ignorant and narrow-minded. Theatres are patronised to an extent that Garrick never dreamed of, and the report of a well acted play seldom fails to draw large audiences. But alas ! this very avidity creates a grave evil—long runs, which are highly unfavourable to artistic development, since the want of variety restrains the actors' talents within narrow grooves and inclines them to tedious mannerisms.

Among the theatrical profession, it is the fashion to assert that acting is a mere matter of opinion, and that there is no positive standard by which its excellence may be determined. We might as well say because in poetry one man worships Wordsworth and abhors Shelley; because in painting some can find no charm in Raffaele but grow rapturous over Frith; because in music Wagner

enthusiasts despise Mozart, that those three great arts are in the same unsatisfactory condition. Fashion in acting changes as frequently as does any other fashion, and the theatre is always the mirror of the age. A man of genius creates a new style, and brings most of the play-goers of his own generation to the belief that it is the only one; imitators spring up, who reproduce only the faults and mannerisms of the master and ultimately bring his style into contempt. Yet all the schools of acting may be broadly ranged in two divisions—the natural and the artificial. What the acting of the pre-rebellion age was like we can only surmise; but that the greatest era of dramatic literature, written, be it remembered, *solely for the stage*, must have been rich in dramatic exponents is past doubt, and analogy would lead us to believe that the style of Burbadge, Alleyn, and their contemporaries like that of Marlowe and Shakespeare, was vivid, full of fire, broad rather than subtle, prone to bombast and exaggeration doubtless, but grand and impressive. With the Restoration was introduced the cold, turgid, artificial manner of the French theatre, which, however, in the person of a Betterton, as in that of a Baron, was rendered grand and sublime and full of intellectual power. Garrick brought us back to Nature; Kemble restored the artificial, until the dazzling genius of Edmund Kean, the last of the great Shakespearian

actors, once more gave us warmth and energy for classical correctness; Macready effected a compromise, and united the salient points of the two schools with something of his own.

It is a disgrace to this country, and well justifies the accusation of the shopkeeping spirit with which foreigners taunt us, that neither the State nor any body of men interested in literature and art, and wealthy enough to give a form to their aspirations, can be induced to found a National Theatre, or any school of acting where artistic training could be obtained, where public taste might be educated, and encouragement given to a higher class of dramatic composition than now finds favour among theatrical managers. Such an institution would draw to the stage quite a different class to that which now affects it, more especially of women, and it is among women that the change is most urgently needed, for while *gentlemen* and artists are by no means uncommon in the ranks of the profession, the *ladies*, with any pretensions to artistic powers, may almost be reckoned upon the fingers. It is only through such an institution that we can ever hope to see revived the genius and glories of

OUR OLD ACTORS.

## APPENDIX.

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### NOTE A.

#### THE STORY OF THE PATENT.

THE account of the manner in which the patent fell into Rich's hands, I take from a letter of John Moody, the actor, addressed to the Editor of the "Monthly Mirror" for 1798, which runs as follows: "Mr. Editor. I send you an anecdote, which whether founded on fact, or otherwise, you have just as I received it; if false, it will be contradicted; if true, it is worth recording. Mr. C. Rich, a younger brother of John Rich, the late patentee of Covent Garden Theatre, told me that Sir Thomas Skipworth's patent fell into his father's hands in the following manner. Mr. Rich, the father of John and Christopher, was an attorney; he had a client to whom Sir Thomas stood indebted for a large sum of money, and Mr. Rich meeting the attorney of the latter made his demand, the other replied that there was no means of paying him, but a Patent to act

plays by. They then agreed to put it up by auction. They did so, and Mr. Rich brought it in for four-score pounds. This patent sold in the life of Mr. C. Rich, after the rate of *four score thousand!* for the present proprietors gave Mr. Colman £20,00 for his quarter. This information I had from Mr. C. Rich at Mr. Coombes in Cook's Court, above five and twenty years ago, where I had the honour to dine. It may be further stated that no receipt having passed, the present proprietors had to pay Sir Thomas Skipworth's relations a large sum of money to substantiate the property."

After Sir William Davenant's death the patent had descended to his wife, from her to his sons Charles and Alexander, who it would seem disposed of it to Sir Thomas. Cibber's account of the transaction is somewhat different, but I am disposed to prefer Moody's story.

In 1802, John Kemble gave Lewis £23,000 for a sixth of the Covent Garden patent, the total value of the property being then estimated at £138,000. Under Garrick's management the value of Drury Lane was increased sixfold.

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## NOTE B.

## BURIAL PLACES OF CELEBRATED ACTORS.

Cibber, Garrick and Henderson lie in WESTMINSTER ABBEY. Betterton, Mrs. Bracegirdle, Mrs. Oldfield, Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Cibber, Miss Younge, Barry and Foote in THE CLOISTERS. Estcourt, Kynaston, Wilks, Macklin, King, Raymond, Rae, in ST. PAUL'S COVENT GARDEN. Mountfort, and George Powell in ST. CLEMENT DANES. Burbadge and Tarleton in ST. LEONARD'S, SHOREDITCH. Hart, at STANMORE MAGNA. Nell Gwynne and the two Bannisters in ST. MARTIN'S IN THE FIELDS. Mrs. Elizabeth Barry in ACTON CHURCH. Booth in COWLEY CHURCH, UXBIDGE. Quin in BATH ABBEY. Rich in ST. ANDREW'S, HOLBORN. Mossop in CHELSEA. Ross and Mrs. Abington in ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, PICCADILLY. Suett in the churchyard of ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL. Perdita Robinson in OLD WINDSOR. Woodward in ST. GEORGE'S, HANOVER SQUARE. Kean and Mrs. Yates in RICHMOND. Peg Woffington in TEDDINGTON. Parsons at BLACKHEATH. Joe Miller was buried in the GREEN GROUND, Portugal Street, upon which a portion of King's College Hospital now stands, his tombstone was to be seen as late as 1850. Munden in ST. GEORGE'S, BLOOMSBURY. Mathews the elder at PLYMOUTH. John Kemble at LAUSANNE. Mrs. Siddons in the NEW BURIAL GROUND, PADDINGTON.

Cooke at NEW YORK. Mrs. Jordan at ST. CLOUD.  
Gentleman Smith at BURY ST. EDMUNDS. Charles  
Young, SOUTHWICK CHURCHYARD, near BRIGHTON.  
Elliston in ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, WATERLOO ROAD.  
William Macready at KENSAL GREEN.

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### NOTE C.

#### LONGEVITY OF ACTORS.

It is a remarkable fact that actors, whose lives are in direct defiance of all the accepted laws of hygiene, should be exceptionally long lived. To quote a few famous instances: Betterton died at seventy-five; Wilks at seventy-six; Colley Cibber at eighty-six; Mrs. Abington at seventy-eight; Mrs. Bracegirdle at eighty-five; Mrs. Porter at between eighty and ninety; Quin at seventy-two; Macklin at one hundred and seven; O'Brien at nearly eighty; Gentleman Smith at eighty-three; King at seventy-four; Yates at ninety-seven; Kitty Clive at seventy-four; Miss Pope at seventy-five; Keely at seventy-five; Roger Kemble at eighty-two; Mrs. Siddons at seventy-six; Mrs. Sparkes at eighty-three; John Bannister at seventy-five; Charles Young at seventy-nine; Munden at seventy-four; Quick at eighty-four; Dowton at eighty-eight; Betty at eighty-three; Miss O'Neil at

eighty-one; Mrs. Davenport at eighty-four; Macready at eighty; Paul Bedford at seventy-eight. To the list of septuagenarians may be added several well known names of the present day; Charles Mathews; Buckstone; Phelps; Webster; Miss Fanny Kelley; and did I insert a number of obscure names, the list might be more than doubled. I came across a curious anecdote the other day of one Mrs. Fryer, an actress, who in 1720 danced an Irish jig at the age of eighty-five, it being her first appearance since the time of Charles the Second.

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### NOTE D.

#### ACTORS' SALARIES.

As we have seen, Hart's salary was only £3 per week; Betterton's and his wife's only £5 (the two). In a list of 1708-9 there is no salary above £6. Mrs. Oldfield's was only £4. But their benefits realised from £150, to £200. In 1729 Mrs. Oldfield's salary had been raised to £12 12s. Mrs. Porter's was £266 per annum. Mrs. Woffington's and Mrs. Pritchard's were £7 10s. Clive's £15 15s. Their benefits averaging about £200 each. Throughout the century, salaries continued to increase. From a Drury Lane list, 1801-2, we find Bannister received £17. King £16. Wroughton £15. Dowton £8.

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Suett £12. Charles Kemble £10. Mrs. Jordan £31 10s. Miss De Camp £12. Mrs. Pope (Miss Younge) £12. There were twenty-five principal gentlemen, and twenty ladies at £3 and upwards. Cooke never received above £20 a week in England, and went to America for £25. A few years afterwards even Charles Young was paid £50 a night.

THE END.

LONDON :

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*Mr. H. B. Baker*

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Baker, Henry Barton  
Our old actors  
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